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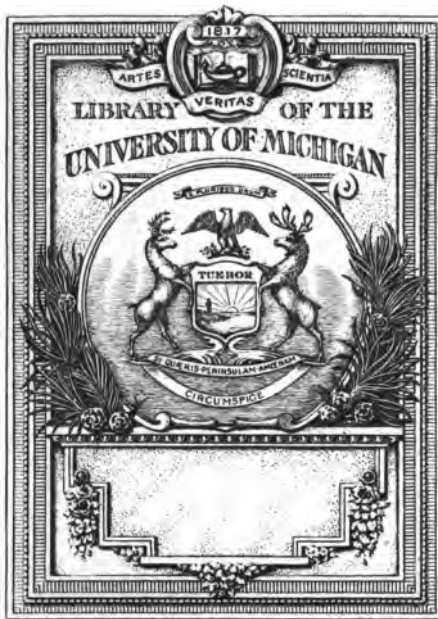
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Robert Cruikshank

TOM RACQUET

AND HIS

THREE MAIDEN AUNTS;

WITH

A WORD OR TWO ABOUT "THE WHITTIEBURYS."

BY

CHARLES W. MANBY.

WITH FOURTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROBERT CRUIKSHANK.

LONDON;

J. & D. A. DARLING, 126, BISHOPSGATE STREET.

1848.

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1848

Darling & Son, Printers, 126, Bishopsgate Street, Cornhill.

CONTENTS.

- CHAPTER I.—Introduction : a little about Tom's Aunts, a little about himself, and shewing how he became acquainted with the Whittleburys.
- CHAPTER II.—Of the Whittleburys.
- CHAPTER III.—Coddlethorpe Hall.
- CHAPTER IV.—The success attendant upon Tom's visit to Coddlethorpe.
- CHAPTER V.—The Aunts' decision—Tom's return to Jermyn Street—and an Accident at Muggins' Gap.
- CHAPTER VI.—Mr. Horace Chuck.
- CHAPTER VII.—Jermyn Street, and the Whittleburys and Aunt Lucy.
- CHAPTER VIII.—Aunt Lucy and Mr. Whittlebury.
- CHAPTER IX.—Something Mysterious.
- CHAPTER X.—The Kiss and the consequence.
- CHAPTER XI.—The mysterious Visiter.
- CHAPTER XII.—The Fate of Tom's note to his dearly beloved—and a Journey to Westmoreland.
- CHAPTER XIII.—A Project.
- CHAPTER XIV.—Robbery (Amateur).
- CHAPTER XV.—Robbery (Professional).
- CHAPTER XVI.—The Town of Welderton, and the Wren's Nest Mine.
- CHAPTER XVII.—Tom lays the Foundation of a Misfortune, and catches sight of his mysterious Visiter again.
- CHAPTER XVIII.—Tom's Chase after Mr. Blink.

- CHAPTER XIX.—Coddlethorpe.
- CHAPTER XX.—Mr. Chuck dines, and meets with an old Schoolfellow.
- CHAPTER XXI.—A Trip to the Lakes.
- CHAPTER XXII.—The Rencontre.
- CHAPTER XXIII.—Treachery.
- CHAPTER XXIV.—The Mid-day Spectre of the Mine.
- CHAPTER XXV.—The Search.
- CHAPTER XXVI.—Conjunction of Villany.
- CHAPTER XXVII.—Indications of a Riot.
- CHAPTER XXVIII.—The Flight and the Mountain Storm.
- CHAPTER XXIX.—The Rescue.
- CHAPTER XXX.—The Colonel loses a Daughter and gains a Niece.
- CHAPTER XXXI.—The Last.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

Death of Red Bill	<i>Vignette</i> —
The reason for the Bells ringing at Coddlethorpe	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	PAGE
A Descent into the Lower Regions	5
Arrival at Coddlethorpe	21
Return from Coddlethorpe	37
Mr. Chuck has his Eyes opened	44
Tom and his Amateur Doctors	71
Mr. Whittlebury and Aunt Lucy	82
The Mine	128
"Robbed and Murdered!"	114
Tom catches sight of Mr. Blink	135
Mr. Chuck's Flight	158
Aunt Lucy's Dilemma	181
Treachery	192

I REMEMBER, when I was at school, that I always took care to “shew up” my pothooks and hangers by twilight, hoping, by that manœuvre, to hide most of the imperfections from the piercing eye of the Dominie—I cannot but plead guilty of the same sort of *ruse* in the present instance. Christmas is coming—that beautiful evening of the year—when men’s minds are more given to charity and plum-pudding than to snubbing each other for innocent tom-fooleries.

Like my dear little self, therefore, of by-gone years, and with much the same feelings, do I now “bring up my writing;” and stand with extended palm, in trembling hope of a good mark; but also with most wondrous misgivings as to the whereabouts of mine ancient, stinging, and most closely-fitting friend,—the strap.

C. M

TOM RACQUET.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.—A LITTLE ABOUT TOM'S AUNTS, A LITTLE ABOUT HIMSELF, AND SHEWING HOW HE BECAME ACQUAINTED WITH THE WHITTLEBURYS.

TOM RACQUET's three maiden Aunts were three of the nicest little souls in existence. Many and many a time had they all three sworn—no, not sworn—had they all three *protested*, when some good-natured friend had whispered in their gentle ears, how Tom had just reaped an additional crop of his wild oats, and was laid up in consequence of the exertions thereunto appertaining—many and many a time had they all three protested “that they would never speak to that incorrigible young fellow of a nephew of theirs any more;” yet, ere a month had elapsed, had that same incorrigible young fellow of a nephew contrived, by means sundry and various, again to reinstate himself in the excellent old ladies' good graces, and to become as great a favourite as ever.

Tom Racquet was certainly a capital fellow; as honourable as the Lord Mayor, and as liberal as Aldgate pump: there was, however, one sad blot upon Tom's fair fame, which rendered him dangerous in the eyes of all the wealthy and pretty-daughter-possessing set of his flowery acquaintance. He could boast of but two hundred pounds per annum; and for anybody, with the character of a gentleman, to pretend to exist upon such a paltry stipend was, to say the least of it, very atrocious behaviour. Papas and Mammias were shy of Tom. Tom was handsome in every sense of the word, and wore a most killing little moustache, and a most captivating pair of whiskers; and, if the truth must be told, Tom was perfectly aware of the fact of his being a handsome fellow, having more than once detected the laughing eyes

of a certain Miss Caroline Whittlebury—(of whom more anon) an extremely pretty girl herself, and, consequently, well qualified to be a judge of such matters—glancing stealthily from under their dark and silken fringe, and resting with evident satisfaction upon his most lady-killing appearance, without knowing that he, the said Mr. Thomas Racquet, was wickedly and delightedly watching the whole proceeding.

Tom, as we said before, could boast of but two hundred pounds of the current coin of these realms for his annual income ; and this, too, totally and absolutely at the will and caprice of his three maiden Aunts, Emily, Lucy, and Cecilia Racquet, of Coddlethorpe Hall, Bedfordshire. His father, like many a gallant fellow before him, had fallen in the service of his country during one of the numerous engagements with our swarthy opponents in the Indian territories. Of the fate of his mother but little was known : shortly after Tom's birth, she had set forth to join her husband at Calcutta, and report had reached Coddlethorpe, about a year after her arrival, of the birth of a daughter ; but as this was never authenticated by letter from either Mrs. Captain Racquet or her husband, the three sisters conceived the fact to be more than doubtful. The packet which conveyed to them the news of a tremendous battle in forcing one of the passes, also brought the intelligence of the death of the gallant and dearly loved brother ; but no letter—no certain intimation of the fate of his widow ever reached their anxious ears ; all clue was lost, and it was generally supposed that she must have perished upon the field by the hands of one of those miscreants who infest the 'bed of glory,' and murder all those in cold blood whom the War fiend may, in his impetuous rush, have hurled to the ground and passed over ere his bloody work was completed.

Colonel Grey, an old officer who fell wounded close to Captain Racquet, mentioned a melancholy incident, which seemed to throw some light upon the fate of the unfortunate lady, although the darkness of the evening at the time of the occurrence prevented his identifying the person sufficiently to render him certain. While lying much hurt within a few yards of his dead friend, towards nightfall a female enveloped in a cloak approached the spot, and hastily stooped over the body of the slain Captain, seemingly with intent to plunder. Raising himself upon his elbow with the intention of shooting the disturber of his friend with his only remaining pistol, the Colonel beheld a male figure, which his long experience at once

detected as a wretch of the worst description, join the party. High words, an imploring prayer, and, finally, a desperate struggle for possession of the body ensued, ending in the female falling under the repeated stabs from the long knife of the assassin. As the murdered woman carried none of those marks about her which distinguish the habitual robber of the dead, the sad inference was drawn that Mrs. Captain Racquet had sought the body of her husband after the action, and had thus miserably perished.

We will not, however, dwell upon the sadder and long by-gone portions of our history, but address ourselves to the more immediate and brighter side, holding it as a maxim that he who weeps because it rained yesterday, stands a very fair chance of losing the sunshine of to-day : sufficient for the day be the evil thereof ; grief for the past should not poison the present, or call forth a fear for the future.

Tom's introduction to the Whittleburys was a little singular, *rather* out of the routine usually observed upon such grave ceremonies and occasions. Tom was caught one fine moonshiny night wrenching off Old Whittlebury's knocker, by no less a personage than Old Whittlebury himself, and forthwith, by a sturdy box on the ear, precipitated off the three little steps which led to the hall-door over the scraper into the gaping jaws of the kitchen area, from which he rolled—the lower part of the kitchen window being open—on to the dresser, and from thence into the kitchen, much to the discomfiture of Susan, the housemaid, who had taken the opportunity of the family's absence for the evening to admit her sweetheart Jerry to a little confidential *tête à tête* and cold mutton. Susan was sitting upon the knee of this favoured individual when Mr. Thomas Racquet suddenly plumped into the area, rolled out of that, and, as we have already intimated, made a temporary stage of the dresser, and then blundered upon all fours into the kitchen, with the knocker in his hand, looking very much like a detected Tom cat upon a cream-stealing expedition ;—if he had happened to have been fitted up with a tail like that interesting animal, wonderful would have been the size thereof. If the dome of St. Paul's had been a wine-bottle, Tom's tail would have been large enough for the bottle brush, so enormous was the degree of surprise into which he was thrown by his sudden and involuntary descent into the regions below.

Tom's surprise, however, was as nothing compared with that which seized upon the faculties of the loving Susan and her faithful Jerry. A gentleman walking suddenly into a room in the usual manner when

another gentleman and lady are chatting over their own peculiar little love affairs, is allowed on all hands to be annoying enough ; but when it comes to a flying leap in at the window, armed with a cast-iron wreath of laurel, and without a hat, it is, to say the least of it, as much more annoying as it is without precedent.

"What were you at, you young rascal?" shouted Old Whittlebury down the kitchen area as soon as Tom had completed his somewhat perilous descent. "Susan! Susan! hit him on the head with the poker till I come down!" And the old gentleman fumbled furiously in his waistcoat pocket for his latch-key, and called aloud for the watchman ; but as the watchman was asleep round the corner, of course it was not to be expected that he could hear anything ; so Old Whittlebury unlocked the street-door and entered his dwelling, determined to take the rascal into custody all by himself.

Now as soon as Susan had in some degree recovered from the 'flustration' into which the entry of the strange gentleman with the knocker in his hand had thrown her, and her sweetheart had applied the back of his hand once or twice to his nose—for Susan, in the start with which she had risen from his knee had driven her elbow violently against that ornamental outwork of his visage, drawing from thence a few drops of that 'regal purple stream,' so much talked about by the gentlemen of the fancy—no sooner, do we say, had she recovered a little from her surprise, than she essayed to interrogate the gentleman upon all fours, whether he were an angel or a goblin in an uncomfortable predicament, when all her attempts at solving the mystery were put into inextricable confusion by the opening of the street-door, and the fierce entry of her master.

"Run! run!" said Susan to her sweetheart—(followers were not allowed at Mr. Whittlebury's)—"there's Master up stairs, cut out at the back-door—make haste before he gets in!"

But the individual thus addressed, at no time remarkable for a quick apprehension, was so completely confounded between the sudden appearance of the gentleman from the area, the knock on the nose, the consequent bleeding thereof and the bawling and bullying of Old Whittlebury to "hit him on the head with the poker," that he lost the only minute allowed him for escape, and, despite the scuffling and imploring of his dearly beloved Susan, stood stock still with amazement.

Old Whittlebury's boots creaked rapidly along the passage, and down the kitchen stairs. No time was to be lost. Tom Racquet



A DESCENT INTO THE LOWER REGIONS.

heard them, and, springing to his feet in an instant, rushed up to the bewildered Jerry, and thrust the street-door knocker into his hand.

"Here, hold this, there's a good fellow," said Tom; and before the 'good fellow' had brought his elevated eye-brows down to their proper places, Tom had scrambled back again through the window, and old Whittlebury had entered the kitchen.

"You rascal!" shouted the irate old gentleman, darting furiously upon Jerry, "I'll teach you to steal my knocker, you ragamuffin! I'll give you two months for it, you incorrigible vagabond! This is the third knocker within these ten days! But you shall have it now I have caught you—you shall have it!"

"Knockers, sir!" said the bewildered lover of Susan, with a stare of unmitigated astonishment.

"Yes, knockers, sir!" roared Old Whittlebury in reply. "Oh, you need not put on such a look of virtuous surprise; it won't do with me—it won't do with me: you rascal, I'll punish you!"

"I didn't steal any knockers, sir!" stuttered poor Jerry.

"Why, you lying varlet," interrupted his accuser; "you have the knocker in your hand at this present moment."

Jerry dropped the iron laurel wreath as if it had suddenly become red hot between his fingers, and favoured old Mr. Whittlebury with another stupefied stare, if possible of more intensity than the former.

"Come along, you scoundrel; I'll give it you!" said Old Whittlebury, laying violent hands upon the smart coat-collar of his all but petrified victim, and dragging him impetuously to the foot of the stairs. "Push behind, Susan, can't you?" continued the old gentleman, almost out of breath, finding that his prisoner refused the ascent. "Push behind, will you?" but Susan's time for bewilderment had arrived, and so she stood with her arms extended like a tragedy queen in a sublime fit of the heroics—the one pointing to the area through which Tom Racquet had just made his hasty exit, and with the other attitudenizing as if she wished to solicit the attention of her Master and Jerry, who were scuffling at the foot of the kitchen stairs. But vainly she tried to make herself understood; words were formed upon her tongue, it is true; but like many other friends in need, the moment they found that they were particularly wanted, they took unto themselves wings and vanished. In the meantime Old Whittlebury pushed, and pulled, and swore his wig off, and got exceedingly warm and exasperated, without forcing his prisoner up a single step.

"Run, Susan, run, and fetch the watchman!" panted her Master. "I'll secure the villain down here until you return."

Just at this moment a rattling peal of the door-bell announced a visiter. "Help! help! help!" shouted the old gentleman with renewed vigour, giving the unfortunate Jerry a tremendous tug at each exclamation. Again the door-bell rattled as if it had caught some of the nervous excitement of its master. "Run, Susan, run! don't you hear the bell? what the devil do you stand staring that way for?" continued the old gentleman.

Away scampered Susan, scarcely knowing why or wherefore, squeezing past the panting pair at the foot of the stairs. The hall was cleared at a bound, and the street-door flung open in a twinkling; when, in the bright starlight of a midsummer's night, she beheld Mr. Thomas Racquet, who had made his way up again, and was looking as cool as a cucumber, and smiling as if a roll down an area was a very pleasant and every day occurrence—without his hat, and all over whitewash.

"Is your Master at home, my dear?" said Tom in the blandest manner possible.

"N—no,—that is, yes, sir; but he's engaged," replied Susan, all in a twitter, and not exactly seeing to whom she was addressing herself.

"Engaged—confound it! I am engaged with a vengeance!" cried Old Whittlebury, who had been listening in hopes of recognizing the voice of some friend. "Here, come and help me, pray, whoever you are!"

Tom moved into the passage.

"Thieves! thieves! murder!" shouted Susan when the light of the hall-lamp, falling full upon Mr. Thomas Racquet, revealed to her the form and features of her mysterious visiter.

"Where?—where?—where?" bawled Tom in reply, and in no way disconcerted by Susan's reception, he rushed past her, and proceeded across the hall.

"Here!—here!—down here!" cried the voice of Old Whittlebury from the regions below; so down stairs ran Mr. Thomas Racquet to where Jerry and his relentless captor were still struggling for the mastery.

"Devilish glad to see you," said the old gentleman as Tom made his appearance, "I am almost spent with holding the ruffian."

"What has he done?" said Tom. "Been robbing the house, I suppose—the rascal!"

"No, no! the knocker—the knocker! Stolen three knockers within these ten days!" gasped Old Whittlebury, relinquishing his hold of Jerry's collar and picking up his wig.

"Oh, the vagabond!" said Tom, seizing the stuttering Jerry, and at the same time contriving to put out the light which Susan had left upon the stairs. "I'll teach you to steal the gentleman's knocker, you rascal, you! and you would not go up stairs, wouldn't you, when the gentleman asked you? We'll soon see whether you will or no. Get through that door, while the gentleman fetches another light," and Tom pushed his captive through the door back again into the kitchen.

"Hold him fast!—hold him fast!" said Old Whittlebury, the broken tone of whose voice bore ample testimony to the violence of the struggle in which he had been engaged. "I'll soon have a light, it's only up stairs." And away he flew to where a plaster statue of a young lady, without a waistcoat, was supporting a glass shade containing the hall-light.

"You fool!" said Tom to the hopelessly stupified Jerry as soon as Mr. Whittlebury had disappeared. "Don't you see?—don't you know me again? Out of the window—fly! Become scarce!—away with you! I'll make it all right with the old gentleman as soon as you are gone;" and Tom pushed him toward the kitchen-window, and tumbled him all of a heap into the area, crying, "Stop him!—stop him!" with all his might. Jerry all at once caught a glimpse of the intention, and shot himself away with the rapidity of lightning. Tom capsized the table with a tray of glasses upon it in an instant, and sprang into the area in seeming pursuit of the culprit, still shouting, "Stop him!—stop him!" at the top of his voice.

"Confound the fellow," said Tom from the area, as Old Whittlebury entered with the glass shade and candle in his hand, which the plaster young lady had obstinately refused for some minutes to have unscrewed from her fist, thereby detaining the old gentleman a sufficient length of time from the scene of action to allow of the escape of Jerry, and the subsequent pantomimic manœuvres of the politic Tom—all as aforesaid.

"Now, then, where is he?" said the old gentleman running his gouty toe, in his extreme haste, against the knocker which still lay where it had been dropped by the fugitive.

"Confound him!" said Tom, getting with seeming difficulty from the area. "He has got clean away—never saw such a resolute ruffian

in my life! Torn my coat, and given me an ugly thump of the head into the bargain." (Tom's head was bleeding from his fall.) "Why the devil didn't you come and help me when you heard me calling? I shouted as loudly as I could."

"Sorry you let him go any how," groaned Old Whittlebury, partly from disappointment and partly from the pain in his toe. "Confoundedly sorry you let him go; that's the third knocker this week. If ever I *do* catch him again, if I don't skin him——;" and the old gentleman doubled his fists, and shook them fiercely in attestation of the ferocity of his intentions. "But you are hurt, my dear sir—you are hurt," continued the old gentleman as Tom's bleeding face caught his eye. "Here, Susan, run up stairs to my room and bring down the balsam and a towel and water; don't stand staring, but make haste." Susan, who was still at the foot of the stairs too much bewildered to make any thing of the sudden changes which had taken place, started off by the force of discipline to obey her Master's behest, and presently returned with the articles in question—except the balsam.

"Cannot find the balsam, sir," said Susan addressing her Master, and staring with all her eyes at Tom, who was deliberately shaking the whitewash from his clothes.

"Why it's on the mantel-shelf in my room;—no, perhaps it is in the closet. I'll go myself—hand the gentleman the water;" and away went Old Whittlebury in search of the missing article, leaving Susan and the knight of the knocker confronted.

"Don't be frightened, my good girl," began Tom in one of his most insinuating tones, taking Susan's hand and dexterously slipping half a sovereign therein. "Don't be frightened: your sweetheart has escaped, and so shall I if you remain quiet—there's nothing to fear; I shall not rob the house of any thing, unless it be your own pretty self."

"I'm sure, sir—if I thought," commenced Susan—but the sound of her Master's footsteps, and an admonitory "Whist!" from Tom settled the matter, and Susan was silent.

Tom was balsamed, and brushed, and washed; and not only stayed there to supper that night, but became a regular visiter of the family in less than a month after; and what was very remarkable no more knockers were stolen in the neighbourhood—a fact which was attributed by Tom to the prowess and presence of mind displayed by Mr. Whittlebury in giving the robber such an unexpected warm reception; and by Old Whittlebury himself to the severe thrashing he had

received from the hands of Tom before he contrived to effect his escape from the kitchen area.

Upon Tom's introduction to Old Whittlebury's supper-table shortly after all this bustle and excitement, his eyes were most agreeably refreshed by the sight of a young lady, who, between her blushing at him and her trembling for the safety of her Papa, presented a most delightful picture to his ardent imagination. The tearful anxiety she evinced as she brushed some of the marks of the recent conflict from the old gentleman's coat, and the way in which she threw her affectionate arms round his neck and gave him a warm-hearted little kiss, were perfectly irresistible and exceedingly tantalizing. Tom quite envied the old gentleman, and felt more than half inclined to defy him to mortal combat upon the spot; but remembering that it would not perhaps be quite proper under the circumstances, turned his head, and walked towards the window so as not to interfere with these little family lovings any more than he could help. Tom was just thinking what a pleasant thing it would be to have a dear little arm thrown round his *own* neck, and a pair of beautiful bright eyes beaming with affection, looking light and love into his very heart, when the report of another kiss brought him, in spite of himself, to the right-about-face all in a hurry. Tom felt irritated again. Mr. Whittlebury had returned his daughter's salute most uproariously loud, and was leading her to her seat, but the feeling of irritation lasted not long. The subsequent ceremony of introduction to the young lady, and the graceful manner in which she performed the duties of the table, soon put all feelings, except admiration, to flight;—and that was the way Tom Racquet became acquainted with the Whittleburys.

CHAPTER II.

OF THE WHITTLEBURYS.

AFTER such a romantic introduction as that described in the last Chapter, nothing less of course was to be expected, than that Tom should fall most irretrievably in love with Miss Caroline Whittlebury, the young lady of the mansion, and that the young lady herself, finding such a handsome young fellow such a decided hero, should not only allow him so to do, but should return the compliment with all that truth and fervour which belongs, according to the best authorities—

the young ladies themselves—exclusively to the female heart. This was all very proper, and very natural, and just as it should have been, and there is not a word to be said against it: in fact, after very mature and serious consideration, aided by several young-lady friends of our acquaintance, we have arrived at the conclusion, that this world would be but a very stupid world indeed, take it altogether, were it not for an occasional hero or heroine (persecuted of course) starting forth to illumine its dreary rounds with their brilliant achievements, and melt its flinty nature with their tears, not to mention the decided good that always necessarily accrues to society at large by their furnishing us “wes,” or editors, with so many subjects for our true love tales and romances. We therefore take upon ourselves to say, backed by our fair friends already mentioned, that Tom was perfectly right in falling in love with Caroline Whittlebury, although all three of his maiden Aunts decided on the contrary in the most peremptory and distressing manner possible, and that Caroline, despite all her worthy Papa’s doubts of the eligibility of the match, was equally justified in accepting Master Thomas Racquet’s vows of eternal attachment and affection, instead of those of one Mr. Horace Chuck, second partner in the firm of “Whittlebury and Chuck.”

Mr. Erasmus Whittlebury, the only exception among the shy Papas of Tom’s numerous acquaintance, was a widower, and a smart active old gentleman, with just that degree of obesity usually classed under the somewhat comical title of “punchy,” that is to say, he was not decidedly fat; we verily believe that he would have quarrelled with anybody who might happen to have the misfortune of supposing him to be so. He had a very small, very round, very fair face, in which good humour reigned predominant; he had also lost his hair,—this, however, was considered rather as an improvement than otherwise to his general appearance, by more than one efficient judge of such momentous concerns. And to let our readers into a little bit of a secret, perhaps the smart old gentleman was just in a slight degree proud of his “nice little round white pate,” as his favourite Caroline would often call it—with the two tufts of hair, silvery white, just over his ears, and the two little well-trimmed cultivations, yclept whiskers, which flourished on his rosy cheeks.

Caroline, the daughter of the above-mentioned Mr. Whittlebury, was an extremely good-natured little personage, and ‘beautiful exceedingly,’ as all good-natured people invariably are, or seem to be, after a few hours’ acquaintance. She loved fun with all her little

heart, and somehow or other contrived to love Mr. Thomas Racquet into the bargain: at least we take it for granted she was beautiful, not only from Tom's repeated asseverations to the fact, but from the report of many other most intelligent witnesses—Old Dame Folkstone, for instance, of the Dairy, for one, who used to say, "God bless her dear little soul! it's always peeping out of her eyes, to see what good it can do"—and then there was Mr. Drayton, the curate, who used to call her the "flower of his flock," and say she was a very amiable young lady—and Old Bob, the gardener and man-of-all-work, who did not mince the matter in the least, but swore boldly, "that Miss Carry was the best and beautifullest little girl in the whole world," and very handsomely cracked the crown of Bill Stubbs, the ostler at the Blue Pig, for daring to insinuate that Nancy Twentymen, the inn-keeper's daughter, was equally as amiable and as pretty.

The interior of the little cottage at Stamford Hill was the very picture of comfort and elegance, under the tasteful management of the young lady; and the garden at the back, under the control of Old Bob, was the very *ne plus ultra* of gardens; and there was a tall grey horse who rejoiced in the name of 'Stately,' but who did not rejoice in the four-wheeled chaise notwithstanding, and who was under the *surveillance* of the old gentleman himself; and doves and pigeons innumerable, besides a great dog for the stable, and a peacock for the lawn, under the care of everybody.

Among all these little comforts and delights had Mr. Thomas Racquet, as we have already related, made himself perfectly at home, not, however, without some little uneasiness on the part of Mr. Erasmus Whittlebury, who soon began to perceive that his agreeable young friend cast his eyes in the direction of Miss Caroline rather more frequently than mere acquaintance warranted; while Caroline, not a little to his dismay, seemed not at all displeased at the attentions thus freely bestowed. But then, as the old gentleman would say, when communing with himself upon the subject, "Suppose Tom has but two hundred a year—there's Coddlethorpe, it must eventually be his; the old ladies cannot live for ever; and I know there is a pretty little sum in the Three-and-a-halfs, besides Flower's Farm, and the houses in Watling Street; so that after all Master Thomas would be as good a match for Carry as Horace Chuck, provided always he contrives to keep friends with his three old maids of Aunts, and also leaves off a few of his mad pranks." Consoling himself a little with these reflections, the old gentleman allowed the visits of Mr. Thomas Racquet

until he himself became a little fond of his society: not, however, all at once; he was as wary as old gentlemen usually are, and extremely jealous of his heart leading his head astray; however, be that as it may, six months after his first introduction Master Tom was a regular and welcome visiter, and the accepted suitor of Caroline, to whose gentle heart did he at last confide the secret of his first introduction to her father's presence.

"Oh, Tom! You *impudent* fellow," said the little beauty, "how could you?"—when Tom had described the whole scene in the kitchen, to which Tom replied in due course—"that he could, and would, again and again, if it were only to catch one glance from those dear laughing eyes—whose light was as the light of the——" something or other highly poetic we dare say, but which we have unfortunately forgotten, not being used to such high-flown fantasies: but it does not much matter; Tom used to talk a great deal of nonsense, we dare say, like everybody else in the same sublime situation, but which he did not intend for nonsense nevertheless, nor did Caroline consider it so either; and so they got on very well together, until at last, after one very delightful moon-light walk in the garden, they found themselves 'engaged,' or plighted, or by whatever other term it is called, when two young people promise to marry one another, if everybody else will let them, and they do not find some one they like better in the meantime; and the union of Tom and Caroline only awaited the removal of two or three little impediments, which, true to the old adage—of true love never running smooth—had thrown themselves in the way. They only wanted the consent of Tom's three Aunts, Emily, Lucy, and Cecilia, on the first part, of Caroline's papa on the second, and that sufficient increase of Tom's annual revenue, which would render such a serious step as matrimony prudent, on the third part,—all of which impediments, however, occasioned a deal of trouble and anxiety before they were got over: not that they were got over at last, the old fellow with the wings, and the hour glass, and the scythe over his shoulder, managing matters for them as coolly as if they had never plotted anything for themselves, and regularly upsetting all their manœuvres, and putting others of his own concocting in their places as fast as they were formed, without the least consideration for the feelings of the parties most interested—an amusement the said old fellow with the wings, and the scythe, and the hour-glass, is most preposterously fond of, and for which impertinent interference we advise all our friends who may happen to have taken him by the forelock, and whom he

may happen to have served in the like aggravating manner, not to let go again in a hurry, but pull the old scythe fellow's hair till his eyes water again, by way of a little revenge.

"I'll tell you what it is, Carry, darling," said Tom, one fine evening, as he was walking very lovingly with his arm round the young lady's waist, "it's no use going on in this way ; we must pop the question to the old folks, and get married. I'll go down to Coddlethorpe to-morrow, and sound my Aunts upon the subject ; they are capital fellows, all three of them ; and between you and me, Carry, are uncommonly fond of me, and Aunt Cecily most especially."

"Aunt Cecily is the youngest, is she not ?" said Caroline, aiming at a particular pebble in the gravel walk with her parasol.

"Yes," said Tom, "she is not more than forty-one or two. I must take her down some new novel or other though ; she is a terrible novel reader, and delights in the romantic. I really think she intends getting married herself some day."

"Lor !" said Caroline, "ridiculous !"—(Caroline was nineteen last birth-day.) "But suppose they should refuse you, Tom, and withdraw their assistance ;" and Caroline looked a little serious.

"I shall scarcely know how to act in that case," replied Tom ; "rather awkward—I must set fire to Coddlethorpe, I suppose, and save them from the flames at imminent personal risk, and so lay them under an obligation ; or take you down in the gig, and upset you at the door, and so work upon their sympathies ; or swallow a little cold gin and water, marked 'oxalic acid,' in their presence, and so frighten them into it. I must manage it somehow ; and the first thing to be done is to set off : so after to-night, good bye for a week, dearest ; the old ladies will not part with me in any case under less time than that ; either the refusal or acceptance will occupy the whole of it, allowing two days to each Aunt, for explanation and examination, and one over, for the general assembly at the conclusion."

And so it was agreed between the high contracting parties that Tom should take his departure early on the ensuing morning, and get the consent of his three Aunts to his tying the indissoluble knot of matrimony. A kiss and an affectionate "Good bye," and half an hour afterwards Tom was rattling up from Stamford Hill to the "Flowe Pot," in Bishopsgate Street. Another hour, and he had dismounted from the coach, and was elbowing his way along the narrow streets leading into Cheapside, on connubial thoughts intent, and meaning to reach Jermyn Street in time for an early supper, and to bed : but good

intentions are proverbial for the brittleness of their nature, and are celebrated also as the favourite material with which a certain clever old gentleman of colour paves a certain warm quarter of his dominions. Tom *intended* to have gone home quietly to bed, but Tom did not go ; for he met the two Rattletons and Harry Phillpots by the church, and set off with them to the theatre at half-price, and from thence accompanied them to a celebrated tavern in the neighbourhood, to supper, where they each had a pint of ale, and ate so many oysters, that about two o'clock in the morning they felt it absolutely necessary for the welfare of their constitutions to go out and have a turn up with the watchman, and after that exhilarating proceeding, to pull all the bells in the street, and finally, to sing loudly and joyfully "God save the Queen," thereby rousing the slumbering loyalty of the inhabitants to a very extraordinary pitch of enthusiasm, as may be supposed, when we mention that one old gentleman who lived at No. 5, after having (as we opine, in a fit of abstraction) emptied the water jug out of the window, plump on the top of the head of Mr. Harry Phillpots, who was performing an accompaniment upon the knocker, actually flung his white nightcap at him afterwards, in token of his extreme satisfaction at the serenade.

Tom Racquet and his three friends acknowledged the compliment, by giving the old gentleman several hearty cheers, and then proceeded on their way until they came to the pump, of which Tom gravely and with the utmost politeness and urbanity, inquired the time of night, remarking that he had forgotten where he had left his watch ; receiving, however, no answer to the inquiry, he insisted upon shaking hands, which he did, with the handle, and then went gravely forward without the desired information.

One "Thomas Smith," one Henry Brown, and two certain Mr. Jenkinses, to their great scandal be it spoken, slept in the watch-house that night, and the next morning were charged five shillings each for the accommodation, and were at the same time admonished by the gentleman who seemed to have the regulation of all these matters, in answer to a strenuous argument advanced by "Mr. Tom Smith," that if oysters really had so powerful an effect upon the animal spirits, as well nigh to cause the almost total though temporary overthrow of his reason, that a little abstinence for the future might be found desirable, especially as he meant that his lodgings for the night, in case of a recurrence of the accident, would be considerably higher than the terms acceded to in the present instant ; for which

information and admonition Mr. Tom Smith, Mr. Henry Brown, and the two Mr. Jenkinsses, thanked the worthy gentleman, and politely withdrew.

Now it so happened, that upon the same evening during which Mr. Tom Racquet and his friends were at the theatre, young Mr. Horace Chuck, Mr. Whittlebury's partner, while upon his return from the city, had had his pocket picked; and in the irritation of the moment, after soundly cuffing the little urchin who had so imperfectly performed the ceremony, gave him in charge to an officer, and promised to appear at the office against him the next day; and Mr. Horace Chuck did make his appearance at the office the next day, just as "Mr. Tom Smith" had concluded the argument upon the oysters; and from what the young gentleman said when he returned to Mr. Whittlebury's after prosecuting the juvenile pickpocket, it was evident that he thought Mr. Tom Smith and Mr. Tom Racquet one and the same person—a conclusion to which Caroline could by no manner of means be brought to consent. "She *knew*," she said with great energy when she had returned to her own room,—“she knew that, at that time, her dear Tom was at least nine or ten miles away upon his journey to Coddlethorpe, and that it must be some mistake, and that Mr. Chuck must have seen somebody very like him.” The old gentleman's solemn vow, therefore, “that that wild young rascal should never darken his doors again,” fell with less force upon her warm little heart than he intended that it should. Caroline cried a little to be sure, when he repeated it at dinner-time; but her faith in her “dear Tom” remained unshaken, and she calmly and trustingly went through her usual occupation, firmly hoping for the best.

“Confound it!” said Tom as he sat at breakfast after his release, scratching his right whisker with the handle of the paper-knife; “how cursedly unlucky! I have missed the coach now, and cannot get to Coddlethorpe till to-morrow;” and Tom gave his whisker another irritating touch with the paper-knife, and thought of what Caroline would say if she knew of his accidental detention; and then fell into a musing fit until the coffee was cold, and then suddenly waked up again as if some indistinct image of the by-gone hour had started again to his imagination in full and vivid outline. “That tall fellow at the back of the office was very like Old Harry's Darning-needle,” said Tom; “but it could not be him either—too early;” and then Tom fell to musing again. This somewhat opprobrious

term was the one by which Mr. Thomas Racquet delighted in distinguishing Mr. Horace Chuck.

The day flew on, and Tom made up his mind to go and explain to his friends, the Rattletons, that oysters and ale always did disagree with him most particularly; but it rained hard, so he stayed demurely at home all day, and went early to bed. The next morning, however, saw him up betimes, and on the box of the Bedford stage, *en route* for Coddlethorpe, in high spirits, and full of hope for a successful termination of his journey. As coaches in the time of Mr. Thomas Racquet did not travel with the same celerity as they do in our own more favoured period, we will take the liberty of anticipating a little, and take a peep into Coddlethorpe Hall, and there await his arrival.

CHAPTER III.

CODDLETHORPE HALL.

THE three Misses Racquet, the inhabitants and freeholders of Coddlethorpe, were, as we have already expressed ourselves, three of the nicest little bodies in existence. They very much resembled each other both in figure and features, and as if to render the similarity still more remarkable, persisted in invariably dressing alike, so that the unwary stranger was often entrapped into mistaking Miss Emily, who was the eldest, for Miss Cecilia, who was the youngest, an error which always called forth a standing set of jokes from either party, the elder always demanding what he meant by taking her for such a giddy young thing as her sister Cecily, and the younger requesting to know how much longer he would require to discover the difference between such a sprightly damsel as herself and such a prim old dowager as Emily. Miss Lucy, who always wore a very natty little pair of gold spectacles upon her nose, and had always a book in her hand, there was no mistaking; she was a great reader, and would sit for hours together in the arbour at the foot of the lawn, poring over the distresses of absent lovers as duly set forth in the usual three volumes from the circulating libraries; while her favourite companion, Lion, a magnificent dog of the Mount St. Bernard breed, would gambol about her until he was tired, and then remain at her side with his huge head resting upon her lap, eyeing her sleepingly from time to time, and winking as she turned over the leaves of her volume.

How it happened that the ladies Racquet had not, during the spring-time of their charms, succeeded in catching and subduing three wild animals of the *genus homo*, and binding them as their slaves for ever, under the title and denomination of "husbands," we must confess ourselves at a loss to state. They certainly possessed most of the attributes to which are ascribed the power of fascinating the species; they boasted of beauty in no inconsiderable degree; and to those to whom beauty is but as the rainbow—

"A moment here, then lost for ever—"

they offered a golden store most undeniably tempting; and, lastly, they were of a temperament sufficiently amiable to have compensated entirely for the absence of all other charms whatsoever. Their ages were, respectively, (and we give them with the full concurrence of the parties,) forty, forty-two, and forty-three.

Coddlethorpe Hall was the very beau ideal of a country house: a combination of tall battlemented towers, and gable ends without number, and huge stacks of twisted chimneys all huddled together in wild confusion,—it had the appearance of having built itself while the architect's back was turned, so completely was all order and regularity set at defiance. The number of small latticed windows scattered up and down, just as convenience or whim had dictated, would perhaps have imparted an appearance of poverty to the building, but for the rich dark ivy which wreathed its green drapery around them, and then roamed stealthily away across the roof, giving the idea of warmth and snugness to the whole, which makes the wayfarer picture to himself all the comforts of the fireside within, and sends him wandering in imagination through those long lines of corridors and galleries, and old tapestried chambers with which his ideas of an ancient country 'hall,' or mansion, may be more or less imbued; but old tapestried chambers within Coddlethorpe Hall, there were none, the said chambers having been long since modernized, notorious as they were for those wily little currents of the atmosphere vulgarly denominated 'drafts,' and to the baneful influence of which said 'drafts' no mortals on earth were more fully alive than the three Misses Racquet, and Miss Lucy in particular: to sit near the window was rheumatism in perspective, and the "crack of the door" was an inlet for a catarrh or a stiff neck at least, despite the sand-bags which defended the one, and the gilt leather and green baize which protected the other.

In one of the air-tight, snug little rooms of this comfortable residence, whose windows looked on to the well gravelled and neatly

kept fore-court, sat two of the Misses Racquet,—Miss Emily, or Aunt Emily, as Tom always called her, at her work, near the window, and Aunt Lucy with her book ; over the mantel-piece hung a portrait of their dearly loved brother, Master Tom Racquet's papa.

"Well," said Aunt Lucy, shutting her book, "I wish Tom would send those three volumes he so strongly recommended me to read, and so faithfully promised not to forget, when he was down here last ; but I suppose they have slipt his memory as usual. Ah ! a very sad memory has Master Tom, especially for his Aunts, until some 'rascally tailor comes to dun,' as one of his funny songs says, and then, lo and behold ! it serves him right lovingly, and we get a long and dutiful epistle, with all our commissions executed, and brim full of hopes and fears for our health and spirits, with a sly coda of a request for a small advance of cash as a wind up."

"My snuff-box too, made of a Kerry cow's hoof, and all the way from Killarney," said Aunt Emily, coaxing an obstinate thread through the eye of a needle.

"Yes, and my little Blenheim," continued Aunt Lucy, "all forgotten—all forgotten : but never mind, we shall hear of the young gentleman soon enough, I dare say ; the first of September is at hand, and then we are sure to have him, with that abominable gun of his into the bargain."

"He is an incorrigible and an ungrateful young fellow," said Aunt Emily, "and I really think I shall make up my mind not to speak to him again : but bless me how it rains !—only listen. How it does rain to be sure ! and I declare if that foolish little kitten has not run out in the midst of it."

"The 'Regulator' has not passed yet, has it ?" said Aunt Lucy, rising and approaching the window. "I am almost ready for my luncheon—dear me, it does rain indeed ! how the drops beat against the glass, and run from the window-frames : the old shrubbery too seems quite in a taking, the wind blows it about so—and poor dear old Lion there pokes his great disconsolate head out of his kennel, as if he anticipated a general deluge at least."

"There's the coach, Lucy, ring for the luncheon," cried Aunt Emily ; "and I do declare if there is not Master Tom sitting with the coachman, without an umbrella, or a great coat, or any thing else on."

This speech of Aunt Lucy's was not intended to be taken exactly in a literal sense. Tom certainly was without a great coat.

"Tom ! no surely !" said Aunt Emily, "why the foolish fellow, he

will be wet through and through. Here, Robin!—Peggy!—some of you run to the coach and take an umbrella to Mr. Thomas,” and Aunt Emily ran out of the room and screamed down the stairs with all her might, and then ran back again and rang the bell very earnestly, as the coach crashed through the wet gravel at the road side, and pulled up opposite the gate of the fore-court. “Talk of the Deuce,” continued the good-natured old maid, as she put on her bonnet preparatory to facing the drafts which were known to be wickedly disporting themselves in the hall,—“talk of the Deuce, and—umph—ahem.”

But talking of the Deuce in the present instance, in spite of the truth of the well known adage, could not have been the means of producing him, even supposing that Mr. Thomas Racquet had been his accredited representative; for we have been well and duly informed, although for our own private and peculiar reasons we decline stating through whom, the why, or the how, that the Deuce at the time he was then spoken of was so fully and laboriously employed in laying down upon his own peculiar ‘*trottoire*,’ or pavement, such an unexpected and enormously large batch of those good resolutions or intentions mentioned some little time back as forming a principal component part of the highways of his dominion, that his appearance at this juncture was a total impossibility, seeing that Tom during the whole of the last ten or a dozen miles had been busy in seriously resolving and intending to reform—to cut all his rackets acquaintance—to forbear billiards—to leave off smoking—to sell his share in the ‘Sylph’ yacht—to forget that he was chairman of the ‘Glow-worms,’ and the ‘Peep-o-day Boys’—never to take more than one glass of ‘*frigidum sine*,’ or ‘*carridum cum*’—and finally, to leave off rowing to Richmond on a Sunday, but go regularly and steadily to church instead. Now some people may grumble at the Deuce seizing upon all these good resolutions before Tom had time to break them up ready for his use—but the Deuce is a bit of a judge in these matters. He saw plainly enough that Tom renounced all these habits and pleasures, not because he knew that they were idle, but because he found that he could not get something else that he particularly wanted, without so doing; therefore, although they looked and sounded to Tom’s mind very like good resolutions, they were in fact little better than forgeries, and as such did the Deuce seize upon them whole, and lay them down all in apple-pie order upon that particular line of road, which he (the Deuce) had some vague idea that Mr. Thomas Racquet, unless he altered some one or two of his courses materially, would in

all probability have to tread ; so that upon the good old system of ' he who runs may read,' Mr. Tom might have the benefit of walking over, and spelling as he went, through the whole catalogue of his fractured and forgotten good intentions.

But again to our tale. Aunts Emily and Lucy disappeared from the window as the coach drew up, and appeared again at the front door, each in a straw bonnet, with a long white veil attached, and holding their handkerchiefs round their necks. Robin ran out to the coach, trying in vain to keep an umbrella in the face of the wind, while Peggy, the housemaid, stood upon the steps under the portico, holding a fly-away sort of cap upon her head, by means of two smart carnation coloured ribbons.

The back door shut itself with a slam, and shattered a pane of glass in the evolution, and the study door opened itself with another, and allowed the wind free leave and license to disport itself among the loose papers, and *et cætera*, which littered the table, all of which it whisked into the air, and then deposited in different quarters of the apartment, and all was bustle and confusion.

Aunt Cecilia meanwhile, who was most particular about damp and drafts, and other atmospheric atrocities, cuddled herself up, in the corner of the room furthest removed from the influence of the open air, and called to her sisters repeatedly, that they would catch their deaths of cold, " standing at that nasty door," and that they had better come in and put on their cloaks.

Among all this spattering of rain, banging of doors, breaking of glasses, and rustling of papers and dresses, did Mr. Tom alight from the box of the Bedford " Regulator," wet through outside with water, and correspondingly damp inside with brandy.

" Portmanteau is in the hind boot," said Tom, addressing the guard, and shaking the wet out of his coat sleeves. " Ah ! Robin, old fellow, how are you ? Rather a damp day this."

" Well it just do rain a little loike, Master Thomas," replied Robin, with a broad grin at the young gentleman's shining appearance, and Robin put the umbrella down into the shrubbery to prevent its levanting with the next gust of wind, and bustled away to help the guard, who was muttering away famously at the hind boot.

" Dear me, how wet they will get," said Aunt Emily, quite in a flutter ; " run, Peggy, do, and hold the umbrella over their heads." And away ran Peggy to fulfil her mistress's behest ; but scarcely had she opened the umbrella, and faced about, ere the wind playfully



turned both her and it inside out ; so Peggy screamed, and retreated with great precipitation, abandoning the umbrella to its fate. The same gallant gust of wind which had put Peggy so wickedly to the rout, then took to gamboling so maliciously about the ankles of Tom's anxious Aunts, that they judged it more decorous and safe to retire within the Hall, which they did, in a very orderly manner ; and there they stood, arm-in-arm, watching Tom and Robin, and the guard, and wondering what on earth all the delay and trouble could be about.

" No portmanteau here, Sir," said the guard at last, in no very pleasant tone of voice, as he closed the door of the receptacle with a slight bang, and pocketed the little key.

" Why, bless me ! Boots told me he put it in himself," said Tom, in evident dismay, for the idea of being wet through, with nothing to change within reach, troubled him.

" Perhaps it's in the fore-boot," suggested Mr. Barnes, the coachman. " Come, look alive, will you ?"

" Look alive, yes," grumbled the guard, whose cigar had just gone out, " if we was a lot o' tittlebats p'r'aps we should look alive in all this water. Here just catch hold of this hat, will you?" and the guard handed a shining broad brim over to Robin, and tucked his head under the legs of the coachman, and instituted another unavailing search for the missing wardrobe of Mr. Thomas Racquet. " Not there, Sir, it *must* have been left behind," concluded the guard, jumping off the wheel in a pet, and snatching the hat out of Robin's hand, " it must have been left behind. People should look after their luggage."

" How extremely provoking," said Tom, giving himself a shake like a water spaniel, " but it cannot be helped now ; bring it down with you to-morrow, will you, Mr. Barnes ?"

" I'll take care of you, Sir," said Mr. Barnes.

During the search and the colloquy which attended it, a little withered old woman scantily clothed, with a sickly looking girl by her side, was endeavouring by various violent efforts to disengage herself and companion from the ample folds of a handsome cloth cloak, with a smart fur collar, which enveloped them both.

" Never mind the cloak, old lady," shouted Tom, as soon as the movement caught his eye, " give it to the coachman when you get to Bedford, and he will bring it back for me ; you will never keep the child dry without it."

The old woman murmured her thanks, and again adjusted the cloak

affectionately round her little charge as the coach moved on, leaving Robin and Tom standing in the road.

"Come in, you troublesome fellow, do," said Master Tom's two anxious aunts, both in a breath, as he walked leisurely through the rain to the hall door. "You are as wet as a sponge, I declare."

"How d'y' do, Aunt Emily?—How are you, Aunt Cecy?—Aunt Lucy afraid of the damp, I suppose."

"Shut the front door, do, some of you, and come in. I am sure you will all be laid up with bad colds from that nasty door," said a voice from the sitting-room, which Tom immediately recognized as belonging to the lady last mentioned.

"We will be in, in a moment, dear Aunt," shouted Tom in reply, smiling as composedly as if he were as dry and as comfortable as a mouse in a corn-bin, while Robin put the door to with sudden and elaborate care, and disappeared across the hall.

"I *am* rather wet, as you say, Aunt," said Tom, bestowing a stamp or two upon the tessellated pavement of the hall, and giving undeniable proofs of the quantity of rain he had absorbed, "and what is more, I have lost my portmanteau, and have not a change of anything within reach, so what I am to do——"

"Get up stairs with you, do, you will catch your death in those wet things," said Aunt Lucy, coming out of the room with spectacles on nose, and book in hand. "No, stay, come in here first, and take a glass of brandy, and tell us how you are, and what you have been about all this time, while Peggy gets your room ready for you." So Tom was taken into the little room, and brandied and scolded for getting wet, and kissed and praised for his good-nature in lending his cloak to the poor old woman on the top of the coach, and finally sent up stairs to his apartment, where he found Peggy with the warming pan preparing a bed for his reception.

"Why, what are you at with a warming-pan at this time of day," said Tom, as soon as the occupation of the damsel became manifest to his eyes.

"Miss Lucy said you were to go to bed directly, Sir," said Peggy, smiling,—(Tom was a favourite of Peggy's)—"or you will take a cold she says. She ran down stairs just now, and she is making something warm for you to take." And Peggy withdrew the household implement from its place, popt it outside the room door, and closed the foot of the bed again with great bustle and dispatch.

"Go to bed!" said Tom, in amazement; "nonsense. Go to bed! I

shall not go to bed. You must lend me one of your dresses, Peggy, and give me a kiss into the bargain, and I shall do well enough; so get along with you, and tell Aunt Lucy not to trouble herself about that 'something warm,' as you call it."

What immediately succeeded this sally of Tom's we have not the means of relating; judging, however, by an exceeding scuffle, which lasted for about a minute and a half, and an exclamation of "Done, Mr. Thomas! Don't," together with a half-suppressed giggle, and the sudden closing of a room door, we should feel inclined to suppose that Mr. Thomas Racquet must have kissed Peggy upon the landing-place, *volens volens* on the part of that young lady, and that the scuffling and giggling, and Done-Mr.-Thomas-do'n't-ing must have had some reference thereunto, inasmuch as people do not usually make a scuffle and giggle, and exclaim when alone, but only when somebody is addressing them in some very forcible manner; however, as the kissing was merely hypothetical, founded upon the premises aforesaid, we of course do not take upon ourselves the responsibility of avouching it as a veritable fact, the matter resting as a secret solely between Mr. Thomas Racquet, Peggy, and that exceedingly discreet and oft-quoted authority, the "door post."

"Mr. Thomas says he had rather not go to bed, Ma'am," said Peggy, as she entered the kitchen, where Aunt Lucy was concocting some mysterious compound at the fire, with a shawl thrown over her shoulders to prevent taking cold in her transit from the parlour.

"Dear me!—how obstinate these mankind are! Cecily, dear," said Aunt Lucy, in great trepidation, "do run up stairs, and make that poor fellow get into bed—he will catch his death."

"Bless us!" replied Aunt Cecily, who was bustling out of a little store-room with a large roll of flannel, "foolish boy, so he will." So Aunt Cecily gave the flannel a hasty push on to the nearest table, and hastened up stairs forthwith, and decorously tapped at Tom's door.

"Come in," said Tom, who was standing without his coat and boots, and wondering very much what he was to do for dry linen; and thinking ever and anon how particularly provoking it was that he should be putting his dear aunts to all this trouble and inconvenience just at the very time above all others he wished to make himself most agreeable. After a small argument between Tom and his aunt—Tom was a terrible fellow for an argument, and never omitted an opportunity of displaying his rhetorical powers—it was decided at once

that he should make the bed his place of refuge at any rate, until the superabundant moisture was expelled from his various habiliments by the instrumentality of the kitchen fire.

"Here's a pretty mess," said Tom as he tumbled into bed, and pulled the counterpane up to his nose. "I wish the hills had been at Jericho before they had knocked the bottom of that stupid cloud out, just at this time too of all others; but it's always the way in this confoundedly cross-grained world; if a man wants to do anything *very* particularly, there is sure to be a storm of some kind brewed in his very teeth to upset it. I shall not be able to say anything about Caroline now until to-morrow, if even then, for these good-natured souls of Aunts of mine will——"

A gentle tap at the room door arrested Tom's sentence. "Come in," said Tom, in a desponding tone of voice, and keeping his eyes in the direction of the door, as if apprehensive of the entrance of the "something warm" promised by Peggy.

"Are you in bed, my dear Tom," was the reply, and in walked Aunt Lucy with a small antique silver tankard filled with some curious hot spicy beverage, whereof the steam was right pleasant to the olfactories; against the antique silver tankard, on either side, leaned a thin slice of toast; the whole being duly set forth upon a small salver of the same precious metal as the tankard, and covered with a lily white napkin all fringed round about.

Tom was invited to sit up and imbibe the contents of the antique silver tankard, and to demolish the toast; but Tom did not sit up, for it occurred to him that when his affectionate aunts had ordered him to bed in such a hurry, they had forgotten to provide certain vestments, without which it is not usual for gentlemen to seek their repose.

"You could not borrow a night-shirt for me, could you, Aunt?" said Tom, with the bed-clothes drawn tightly under his chin.

"Bless my heart!" ejaculated Aunt Lucy, in some surprise, and without another word she placed the tankard upon the table, and vanished down stairs, presently returning with a neatly-folded parcel of fine linen, which had evidently been just submitted to the fire, and which she laid upon the foot of the bed, and again disappeared, thereby giving Tom an opportunity to invest himself therewith.

Tom took the 'fine linen,' and finding sundry strings, and lace-frills, and other unaccountable appendages attached thereunto, tumbled and tossed it about a great deal, "pished," and "pshawed," and

laughed, and eventually put it on, and announced himself ready for company.

Aunt Lucy immediately entered, accompanied by Aunts Emily and Cecily, and all three complimented their nephew most highly upon his captivating appearance in the lace frills, and then insisted upon his drinking the contents of the little tankard, and going to sleep forthwith. Tom swallowed the mixture, and then commenced arguing the point, as was his wont, about going to sleep, and taxed his powers to the utmost in endeavouring to persuade his three kind aunts that he never caught cold—that nothing ever hurt him—that he hated to be fussed and bothered—and much more to the same purpose, the which oration was however prematurely and suddenly cut short. Tom was quietly and gently pushed down upon his pillow by the affectionate hands of Aunt Lucy, with a serious admonition to be a good boy, and not be obstinate.

Tom stretched himself out in despair, for he plainly saw that his aunts were determined to consider him as an invalid in perspective, and to submit him to the requisite quantity of nursing.

“Dear me!” said Aunt Cecily, with so sudden a start that the patient thought something material must have happened to her at any rate, “the pillow-case!” and she flew out of the room in much haste, and as quickly flew in again, and walking briskly up to the side of Tom’s bed, dexterously twitched his head up from the pillow, and before he was half aware of her intention, invested him with all the glories of a magnificent ‘*bonnet de nuit*,’ with a smart bow on one side, and three luxuriant rows of lace round the front; this she tied securely on, despite Tom’s struggles and remonstrances, alluding all the while to sundry and divers unctuous preparations used by young gentlemen in the cultivation of their hair and whiskers, and then diverging suddenly, and expatiating upon the well-known purity of her bed-linen.

“There!” said Aunt Cecily, quite elated at her success in conquering her nephew, “I do declare you look exceedingly handsome, Tom; the smart bow, and the lace, and my cap, altogether, set off your whiskers very much—I wish you would not have them quite so large by-the-by—and give those two little moustaches, or whatever you call them, close under your nose, quite a unique appearance.”

Tom had just concluded the last grumbling remonstrance at this new infliction of arbitrary power, and was gradually getting himself into temper to join in the smiles of his surrounding nurses, for they

were all three—or rather all four, for Peggy had just entered the room with some bottles of hot water—they were all four as busy as bees about him, when to his dismay the curtains at the foot of the bed were seen to open slowly and mysteriously, and the bed-clothes at the foot were gradually raised. No sooner had this romantic movement taken place, than Tom suddenly started up in bed and *swore*!

Yes—and we are sorry to have to chronicle such a deed—but Tom did swear, and that right roundly too, and in no very measured terms either, and looked excessively astonished and exasperated to boot.

“D——n!” said Tom, in a very loud key, “what’s that?”

“Now, do lie still, Tom,” said Aunt Lucy, the only one of his four nurses who had withstood the shock of this sudden explosion, Aunts Emily and Cecily having jumped some yards away from the bed-side in the extremity of their surprise and horror. “Do lie still, Tom, it’s only the water-bottle for your feet.”

“Yes, but it’s cursed hot,” continued Tom, in the same loud and irascible tone, “and the cork has come out besides.”

“Oh! Bless me, so it has!” said Aunt Cecily. “Well, well; don’t swear so, there’s a good boy, Tom, it frightens me so, and besides it’s—well! well! dear me—we’ll put a blanket over the foot of the bed just where the water is, and all will be right again.”

So the blanket was placed, but nothing could induce Tom to put his feet down and lie straight. Tom detested flannel, as he called it, with all his might, and stormed away right lustily, but all to no purpose; his protestation that flannel and worsted, and all such villainous stuffs, were enough to kill him, fell to the winds; he was nightcapped, and bound, and in a bed, and a prisoner, and his custodiers were in high feather and bustle; they had got something larger than the kitten this time to nurse, and seemed determined to enjoy the opportunity to the utmost. To all poor Tom’s imploring looks for mercy from among the plaited borders of the nightcap, as the fire received a fresh poke, and the room became warmer and warmer, nothing was returned but portentous and grave looks; and then the aunts would move stealthily about, and suddenly take to speaking in whispers, as if Tom were in a most mortal strait, and half dead at the least, and never expected to recover; and so Tom remained curled up in bed like some pet lap-dog, except perhaps that he was a size or two too large, and had not a tail to put over his nose.

For the whole of that long—long afternoon did Tom remain in his feathery nest, listening to the roaring of the fire and the pattering

of the rain, and not daring to venture out, lest Aunt Lucy, or Aunt Cecily, or Aunt Emily should happen to come in and catch him in the treasonable act. "I am sure they ought not to refuse me anything, after such a martyrdom, as this at any rate," thought Tom.

Towards evening, Peggy closed the curtains of his bed all round, and had another good poke at the red hot and glowing fire ; and then, as night time approached, one or other of his dear Aunts came softly in and peeped at him, and then just tucked him up a little, and then retreated with noiseless footstep, all of which Tom bore at last with becoming philosophy, having become sleepy with the heat and the silence, not however before he had several times attempted to renew the argument with his anxious nurses, and had been as often admonished in a serious whisper, "not to be obstinate and wilful," and to bear in mind the baneful effects of a cold caught from getting wet through ; so that poor Tom at last was fairly defeated and run down, and had nothing for it but to turn himself over and patiently await the morning light, and his dry wardrobe.

A few hours after, and another dose from the silver tankard, and shortly again a large basin of gruel, with plenty of brandy, and nutmeg and sugar, made its appearance, and then his three Aunts, to his unspeakable joy, bade him an affectionate good night, and left him to his repose.

"Confound the dear good old souls, what a fuss they have made about a bit of a wetting," said Tom, as the door closed gently after the retreating figures of the three Misses Racquet ; "and I wonder what they will say to-morrow, when I tell them I want to get married."

What the three ladies in question did say, and how they received the intelligence, together with how their nephew put the question to them, will be found in the following Chapter.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SUCCESS ATTENDANT UPON TOM'S VISIT TO CIDDLETHORPE.

As Mr. Barnes, the coachman, had stopped one of his compeers upon the road up, and had by his means telegraphed the loss of the port-manteau to the London office, and as Mr. Thomas Racquet was very

well and very favourably known among the fraternity of the whip, there was little difficulty in the missing article finding its way to its rightful owner, by the first conveyance, upon the following morning. Tom, therefore, was enabled to rise early, which he did, none the worse for the rain, and perfectly recovered from the effects of the nursing of the previous day ; and, accompanied by Lion, strolled into the grounds to await the breakfast-hour, and lay the plan of his forthcoming campaign with his Aunts. It being Sunday, however, Tom took into his serious consideration the advisability of deferring the interesting object of his visit until the day following. Aware of the strictness with which his Aunts were always in the habit of observing the day of rest, he soon decided upon allowing his proposition to stand over, firstly, in deference to their habits of reserve upon that day ; and secondly, because, somehow or other, it did not seem quite so easy a thing to talk about *now*, as it had done while he was on the coach arguing the case with the aunts of his mind's eye. The same Aunts, in real bodily presence, somehow or other appeared alarmingly different ; there was something formidable in the arch of their eyebrows, which had escaped his attention during the argument he had held with them in his fancy, and in which of course they were most signally defeated—something which set Tom thinking that it was just possible they might not answer exactly as he had answered for them, and so put him out a little. The very spirited and uncontrollable style in which they had carried their successful nursing manœuvres, despite his most strenuous and determined opposition, also unnerved him ; and he felt rather chilly and anxious, and, for the first time in his life, more than half afraid of his dear Aunts ; and thought to himself, “ how very odd it was that the consciousness attendant upon these little love secrets—though not a guilty consciousness either—should make such cowards of us all.”

Breakfast-time arrived, and Tom ate in silence, after having fully satisfied his kind-hearted nurses that he had caught no cold, and then prepared to accompany them to church with a gravity and decorum which quite won the three ladies' good graces, and immediately convinced them that Tom had at last done with his wild oats, and was becoming a serious, good, and very prudent young fellow ; and so the aunts attired themselves in their usual plain straw bonnets, with the white veils, the dove-coloured silk dresses, and the white shawls, and, escorted by Tom, sallied forth to church—a little quaint old-fashioned building, in quite an out-of-the-way nook among the tall trees, just at

the end of the village. Here again a little peculiarity of the good ladies became manifest, not the slightest notice was taken of them by the various Sunday groups of villagers which were collected at the many cottage-doors preparatory to going to church ; not a bow, or a scrape or curtsy, proclaimed to the visiter who might happen to be sojourning at the Hall, that its amiable owners were the ladies in ascendant, and that from them flowed the charitable stream of the place. This coldness and inattention upon the parts of their poor-neighbours might have seemed strange to those unacquainted with the temperament of the three Misses Racquet, who were of that class—which does good silently and by stealth, and for the sake of doing good, and not for the sake of having it looked at and commented upon by the world—nay, not even by the world of a little village. They detested all the bowing and scraping, and pulling of forelocks, and curtsying, which usually attends the steps of the rich squire or charitable lady of a place ; and had begged it of their humble neighbours, as a favour, to allow them to pass among them with no more notice than they would in all common courtesies offer to each other. They could not, however, entirely control their village popularity ; some little maiden, upon whom they would unexpectedly come in their walks, would, all of a sudden, and as if she could not help it, drop a hurried curtsy ; and old Will Gardner's hand would always find its way to his hat before he could recollect himself ; while the young fellows, forbidden to bow, would grin knowingly, hang their hands sheepishly, and steal a pleasant look at the pale faces of the wanderers as they passed, and take a tighter grip of their stout ash-sticks, as if they would like to be laying them lustily about the heads and ears of anybody and everybody who might work their favourites any harm ; in short, the three Misses Racquet were the idols of Coddlethorpe village—and very deservedly they were so too.

How brilliantly and joyfully doth the sun break forth upon a country Sunday morning ! tinging the tall old trees with his golden beams, and making them greener and fresher than ever. Never does week-day sun shine half so serenely. The breeze which comes sweeping over the corn-fields seems more gentle and scent-laden as it bends the tall grass, and whistles away in the distance. The birds whose song of yesterday was shrill and noisy, seem filled with the spirit of the day, and become more subdued in their merry strains. The bee, which has been buzzing round you all along by the old sunny wall, and has only left when you arrived at the little swing-gate leading to

the church-yard, has sung a more joyful and a mellower note ; and the numberless small wild flowers which adorn the hedge-rows seem to have waited for this day to burst their tender sheaths, and lift their beautiful heads to heaven. The continuous ringing of the two bells from the little church-tower, sending their holy summons far and wide over the country—the slow and steady step of the labourer, as he saunters up the road with his hands in his pockets, and a smile on his face, for he is not in a hurry to-day—the gaily painted cart which rests quietly beneath the old shed, with the loose straw all swept into a corner ; nay even the old flint and whitewashed walls, and half-decayed and moss-grown park-palings, seem to feel the influence of the time, and tell sweetly and silently of the hallowed day of rest. The same calm and holy quiet which sheds its serene influence upon outward objects penetrates the old church, and gives to its bare walls and poor furniture that appearance of cheerful sanctity which may be often looked for in vain among the costly fittings of more fashionable places, where the trimly-lined pew and well-cushioned seat announce the opulence of the parish, and almost seem to intimate that the worthy parishioners, rustling in silks and satins, and redolent of perfume, would even decline the path to heaven unless it were made comfortable, and sufficiently select for people of condition, and kept uncontaminated by the low and vulgar. All the fittings of the little church at Coddlethorpe were alike of common unpainted deal ; and many have been the times that old Will Gardener, or his son, or old Dolly Stubbs, have sat in the same pew, and side by side, with the rich ladies of the Hall, and read from the same book, when their accustomed places had been previously occupied, or the little church more than ordinarily full.

The Sunday passed quietly and serenely with the three old ladies, and their somewhat volatile nephew ; and when evening threw her warm and sunny light over the lawn and in at the painted windows of the drawing-room, and they had all four sat gazing upon the landscape for some time in silence, the Aunts made up their minds entirely that their darling Tom ~~was~~ ^{has} very much improved, and decidedly a great deal more seriously disposed than ever they had seen him before ; while Tom, for his part, was again arguing with the Aunts of his mental fancy, and laying down all sorts of plans for introducing the object of his visit in a fit and becoming manner on the following morning—for he had made up his mind to break the subject to them during the hour of breakfast. On the Monday morning, however, the

nearer the breakfast-hour approached, the more Tom felt inclined to defer his intention until the hour of dinner; and when it did at last arrive, Tom almost wished it away altogether, there were so many little ridiculous interruptions—nothing in themselves, certainly—but it is astonishing what a little will do sometimes in upsetting a man's determination, especially in cases where he does not feel fully confident of a favourable reception for the communication he wishes to make. The nervous degree of excitement with which he watches every little incident, and catches at every little word, and fancies that they all more or less bear upon the secret subject of his thoughts, renders him uncommonly fidgetty in his behaviour, and discursive in his conversation on these occasions—laughing twice as much as any body else, at a joke—moving about a great deal more rapidly than there is any occasion for, and being so overweeningly polite and attentive to the person or persons to whom the mighty matter is to be addressed, that they more than half guess the poor fellow is out of his wits, and stare at him very fearfully in consequence, which last operation does not by any means add to his presence of mind or bodily comfort.

First of all, and just as Tom had comfortably arranged how he should commence his interesting business, and had contrived to marshal the reluctant first sentence into battle array, did Aunt Emily put the whole battalion of thought to flight, by suddenly insisting upon his moving “out of the way of the crack of the door,” and then treating him to a somewhat elongated dissertation upon rheumatism and catarrh—the certain consequences of his exposing himself in so dangerous a position. In a little while, however, Tom rallied his forces, and made up his courage to the attack, and was again defeated and totally put to the rout, by Aunt Lucy unfortunately discovering that he was sitting immediately in the draft from the window. The consequent movement of his chair, of course rendered another arrangement of his ideas necessary, before he considered it advisable to open the ball; and then the “confounded tea-kettle,” as Tom very irreverently called it, took it into its head to boil over, and cost him a scalding in the removing, and a scolding when he had done—the said tea-kettle being *the* most especial “little brass tea-kettle;” and Tom had inadvertently popt its polished sides down all amid the smoke, attending more to his own burnt fingers than to the welfare of the little household pet; and then Tom gave the kitten a piece of bread and butter, who, of course, ate it butter-side downwards upon the

carpet, and brought him into disgrace again. In short, endless seemed the string of petty misfortunes under which he was doomed to suffer during that eventful breakfast. At last, Tom grew outrageous and desperate, and vowed to himself, that, *coûte qui coûte*, the murder should out; and so out he tumbled it, but in a very different style indeed to what he had pictured to himself. None of the fine speeches he had prepared for the occasion—none of the all-but-unanswerable reasons which were to annihilate the arguments he felt convinced his Aunts would advance—nothing took place as he had planned it, and everything was very provoking and disagreeable.

Tom soon brought his true love-tale to a close, for the serious countenances of his listeners alarmed him; bringing in as many of the fine sayings he had prepared for the occasion as he could recover from the confusion, but all to little purpose. Aunt Emily put down her half-raised cup without tasting its contents, perfectly petrified at the communication, and looked at him over her gold spectacles; Aunt Lucy stayed her hand in the middle of buttering her toast, and looked at him likewise; Aunt Cecily sighed, and forgot the urn, and so flooded the tea-pot, and looked at him also: and a sudden and an awful calm settled upon the breakfast-table.

When the three ladies had finished looking at Tom, they commenced looking at each other; and when they were satisfied with that, took to looking at Tom again—but words spake they none.

Now it is a very awkward and unpleasant thing, when a man expects to be argued with, and has been at some pains to con over all the positions likely to occur during the encounter, and has got all his reasons and fine phrases into excellent order—we say, it is a very awkward and uncomfortable thing to be met with nothing but silence, and so felt Tom. He had never taken into consideration the likelihood of having all his arguments demolished after this fashion; and began, like a prudent general when anticipating a defeat, to bring up what he considered his reserve; so after having endured the oppressive stillness for some few minutes, Tom ticked off a long catalogue of Caroline's manifold virtues and accomplishments, and wound the whole handsomely up with a statement of the immutability of his own affections, and the impossibility of his being able to exist without her,—and waited for the effect.

But there *was* no effect. The purring of the kitten, and the ticking of his own watch, were the only sounds which fell upon poor Tom's anxious ear, so intense was the silence which reigned around.

CHAPTER V.

THE AUNTS' DECISION.—TOM'S RETURN TO JERMYN STREET, AND
AN ACCIDENT AT MUGGINS' GAP.

THE suspense at the breakfast-table was of some duration: matters grew serious, and Tom grew nervous, and blushed with disappointment to his very finger ends. The hot water, however,—which had escaped from the urn, and which, after overflowing the tea-pot, had been for some little time quietly trickling into Aunt Cecily's lap,—brought matters to a crisis, by gradually penetrating that lady's dress, and recalling her to the use of her tongue. "Tom," said Aunt Cecily severely, "I *do not* know what to think of you; you are always doing something dreadful."

This little speech was the spark which fired the mine. The Aunts, recalled to themselves by the sound of a female voice, all at once and together recovered from the silent surprise into which Tom's announcement had thrown them, and instantly plunged into a most lively and animated fit of talking: their eyes, no longer directed towards each other, were all intensely centred in one focus, and that focus was their luckless Nephew. The business of the table was renewed with a tenfold vigour. Aunt Emily buttered away at her toast very fiercely, and talked incessantly; while Aunt Lucy's cup was in an endless state of ups and downs,—

"Like keys of Broadwoods' in a long concerto,"—

as she alternately sipped its contents, and snatched it from her lips in order to get in a word or two upon the topic in question. Aunt Cecily, between rubbing her dress and rattling the breakfast things, woke the Canary, who, lending his shrill pipe to the general voice, added greatly to the confusion. Poor Tom was as much beaten by the present hubbub as he was by the previous silence; there was no answering one position before half a dozen new ones were poured upon him with the rapidity of lightning, all tending to the same melancholy conclusion—that his marriage was preposterous, and not to be thought of for an instant, and must not be.

"You are only one-and-twenty, Thomas!" said Aunt Lucy as soon as this sudden storm had in some measure abated; "and, besides——"

"No one should marry until after thirty, at any rate," broke in Aunt Cecily.

"You must give up all thoughts of any such mad scheme, Thomas," said Aunt Emily; "we cannot entertain the idea for a moment; and

do most strictly, and once for all, forbid any further mention of the subject; at any rate, until you are four-and-twenty, when your poor father's property will of course become yours; that is,—and you will remember that I am right in my statement,—unless you marry without our consent before that time, in which case the property is forfeited to us, merely leaving you a hundred and fifty pounds a year, should you play such a foolish prank, as uniting yourself to such a giddy young thing as a girl of nineteen must necessarily be.”

Tom's courage had by this time a little revived, and he attempted to open the pleadings again, but his Aunts were inexorable; all Tom's endeavours were thrown away, and his unanswerable arguments finally and for ever extinguished by a strict injunction, under all sorts of tremendous penalties, never to renew the subject.

As Tom's speeches waxed shorter, did his face wax longer; until, at the close of the sitting, any diminution of the one or elongation of the other became an impossibility.

The rest of the morning wore on heavily enough, but little was said by either party; and Tom was heartily glad when the up-coach gave him the opportunity of leaving Coddlethorpe, and again joining in the busy throng of London. He felt, as he expressed himself some little time afterwards, as queer as a celebrated hat-band known to the classical student as 'Dick's:' the said hat-band having been, from time immemorial, the type and symbol of every thing from which the original splendour hath for ever departed.

Mr. Barnes, too, had not been able to recover ~~the~~ cloak. The old woman to whom Tom had so kindly lent it on his journey down had forgotten to return it, and had taken the opportunity, while Mr. Barnes' back was turned during the bustle of the arrival at Bedford, to decamp with the same, leaving Tom the consciousness of having done a good-natured action, as his only reward and consolation: a reward and consolation, we scarcely need say, Tom did not think by any means adequate to the extent of the favour he had conferred.

Tom smoked fourteen cigars, and imbibed two glasses of brandy and water and one of ale, between Coddlethorpe and London, from which it may very safely be inferred that he was a little out of spirits, and, also, that he had, in some measure, forgotten his last new batch of good resolutions, more especially those immediately referring to the exciseable articles in question. Tom certainly *was* out of spirits, in short, quite 'in the dumps.' He scarcely said a word to Mr. Barnes, after handing him a cigar, and calling him a fool for losing

the cloak ; never once thought of borrowing the guard's bugle to astonish the natives withal ; never even smiled at Mr. Barnes' repeated enquiries of the countrymen he met—whether they had not seen a little brass dog with a brown collar ; forgot to take a peep at the insides, although a very pretty girl was of the number ; but sat upon the box the whole time, silent and moody, gazing down upon the wheel as it trundled merrily round beneath him. He varied the scene a little, however, at the changing of the horses, by storming at the people of the inn if they did not bring him his brandy and water with all due celerity, and otherwise so comported himself, that both Mr. Barnes and the guard agreed that “ the old ladies must ha' been down upon his tibby uncommon hard this time, and no mistake.”

At the ‘ Magpie,’ the last stage but one, four beautiful and high-spirited bays were put to the coach. Tom, being a judge of horseflesh, or fancying himself so, awoke a little from his melancholy, and watched them with some delight as they all four stood pawing the ground, and rattling their brilliant harness in impatience to be off. Mr. Barnes and the guard were in the bar of the inn inspecting a splendid new four-in-hand whip, mounted with silver, a present from young Lord Dashwood to the said Mr. Barnes, and which had only just arrived. The horse-keeper stood at the heads of the leaders, soothing them with his rough tones, and affectionately stroking their noses, while ‘ Boots ’ held the reins, and endeavoured to restrain the impetuosity of the wheelers by coaxing them and patting their finely arching necks, when suddenly there broke upon the ear a terrific yelping and barking, and other signs of canine distress, intermingled with the usual oaths and execrations with which occasionally man asserts his supremacy over the brute creation. The next minute, there came in sight a small dog harnessed to a lumbering cart, filled with brushes and tin-ware,—(for, however strictly dog-carts may be forbidden in London, they still occasionally make their appearance in the country,)—the animal was being submitted to a slight castigation by means of a thick stick wielded by the brawny arm of some imperfectly constituted specimen of the *genus homo*, who was sitting upon the front of the vehicle, with his legs dangling on either side.

As the panting animal and its affectionate master turned the corner of the road, which brought them within view of the coach, the gentleman was unseated and rolled into the ditch by the road-side, while the dog flew with additional speed to the first shelter which presented itself, and which, unfortunately for Mr. Thomas Racquet and his

fellow-passengers, seemed to be the coach upon which they were sitting. The horse-keeper, seeing the dog make directly for the coach, shouted and turned him aside; but the evil was scarcely delayed; the next moment poor 'doggie,' with the doomed cart at his heels, rushed madly between the horses, flinging his cumbrous adjunct against the legs of all four, and scattering the contents in every direction. The high-spirited animals, not relishing this treatment, immediately resented it by rearing and kicking most furiously; the cart was demolished in an instant, wheels and splinters flying into all parts of the road, while the unhappy cause of the mischief lay sprawling and moaning under the coach, from which his master dragged him by the leg just in time to receive one last lick of the hand before he died.

The horses plunged and reared fearfully. The horse-keeper and Boots shouted to the coachman, and endeavoured to pacify them; and Mr. Barnes and the guard just answered the call in time to see the horse-keeper thrown violently down, and Boots dragged off, holding manfully on by the reins—another minute, and Boots was pulled down upon his face, and the four frightened horses were flying madly away. They turned the corner with a terrific swing, nearly throwing Tom off the box with the suddenness of the lurch, and in two more minutes had placed a good mile between themselves and all pursuit. The passengers held their breaths and their hats, and clung to each other as the rapidly whirled vehicle rolled from side to side; ever and anon passing within a foot of a large pile of stones or a deep ditch, and miraculously escaping both: onward tore the horses, making the pole spring again with their impetuous jerks, until they met the 'down coach,' the driver of which cautiously gave them a wide berth by drawing his own cattle almost into the hedge, and holding them firmly in hand, while all the outside passengers stood up to see them pass.

"The reins!" shouted the coachman, the instant Tom and his affrighted fellow-travellers came alongside of him. Tom did not hear the voice among the clashing of the gravel, the clanking of the splinter-bars and harness; but following with his eye the directing finger of the coachman, he saw the reins dragging along the road.

"If I had a stick, I might recover them, and stop the horses," said Tom, turning round to one of his white-faced fellow-travellers.

"Here—here—here's a stick!" said two or three half-suppressed voices; and several sticks, with hooked handles, were hastily handed to Tom, who deliberately joined two together by means of his hand-

kerchief, and then laid himself down flat along the foot-board, clinging with one hand as he best could, and commenced fishing for the reins, every sudden and violent swing threatening to throw him bodily into the road.

"Mind the child! mind the child!" shouted half-a-dozen voices, as a little tottering 'wee thing' ran playfully out of a cottage, followed rapidly by its mother. Tom turned his head as he lay, and saw the little innocent lift its tiny arms in affright, and the next instant beheld it propelled forward a yard or two by a blow from one of the horses. Tom's heart sickened at the sight, and he turned his face and looked down at the wheel over which he was hanging; he had scarcely done so, ere the coach gave a slight but sudden lift, and a pale small face glanced rapidly under him, the wheel crushing it hideously as it passed; the next instant, the prostrate body of the mother followed: one short shrill piercing scream, and all was over; and the maddened horses were tearing onward as rapidly as ever.

Tom was roused from the momentary stupor into which this sad sight had thrown him by the voice of a traveller behind, urging him for God's sake to endeavour to get hold of the reins. Tom again essayed, and after a minute's careful fishing recovered them one by one, and then regained his position upon the box, and tried either to control or pull up the horses.

"We shall be over now!" said an old gentleman, clinging with a nervous tenacity to the iron handles by his side, as the coach commenced a series of swings and lurches from side to side, occasioned possibly by Tom's pulling the horses out of a straight line, each swing more sweeping than the former, as if it were gathering strength for one final and tremendous effort.

"Pull them up *hard*, sir!—Pull with all your might!" said the old gentleman; while the other passengers clung to each other in dismay; and one jumped down, and was killed on the spot, just as the coach had again recovered its balance.

Tom redoubled his efforts, and, with one sharp and desperate tug broke the short reins off by the buckles, and very nearly fell backwards into the road.

"It's all over now, however," said Tom, casting the remaining reins from him. "We must take our chance—they cannot keep on much longer at this pace;" and Tom flung the apron from the box, and made all clear for a fall.

"This will do the business, if anything does," continued Tom,

addressing his pale and trembling fellow-travellers, as they ascended a gentle rise in the road. "There's a cursed ugly hill on the other side, with a very sharp turn at the bottom."

Tom's knowledge of the road had not deceived him. There *was* a very ugly hill after gaining the top of the rise, and a very dangerously sharp turn at the bottom; with the road constructed, as roads usually are at the bottoms of hills, with sharp turns, inclining in such a direction as to aid rather than correct any dangerous inclination given to a rapidly descending vehicle.

"Hold on to your seats, and fall with the coach!" shouted Tom, as the difficult spot presented itself. Round swung the coach, running upon its two side-wheels for some yards, while the horses, refreshed by the temporary relief of the descent, dashed on more madly than ever. Once again, all four wheels touched the ground, but only for an instant; a sudden lurch to the off-side, which loosened all the luggage on the roof, and flung some of the uppermost into the road, immediately followed; and then another prolonged series of swings commenced, heavy, violent, and sickening, until, at last, with one tremendous heave, the vehicle balanced itself for an instant upon the two near-wheels, and then fell crashing upon its side, burying under it a passenger, who, forgetful of Tom's caution, had jumped from his seat as it fell.

For five long minutes all was as silent as the grave on that sequestered part of the road. The sun shone merrily over the wreck, and on the lifeless forms which lay scattered about it. The birds withheld their little songs for awhile, half scared by the sudden crash, and waited until reassured of safety, when their cheerful twitter was again heard from the waving trees; and they hopped into the road, and through the hedges, as if death and danger had not been busy around them.

Tom was the first to recover from the shock, and started to his feet, disturbing half a dozen little flutterers who had just settled near him. The coach lay upon its side some distance in advance, having been drawn on by the horses before the traces gave way—one of the hinder wheels still sluggishly turning in the air. The horses were gone; human beings and boxes were scattered in confusion around him, and a faint moaning reached his ear, seemingly from under the coach. Tom turned to offer his aid, but the effort was too much; his heart ceased beating—surrounding objects became of a dull and leaden colour to his eyes—a feeling of faintness came upon him, and he

reeled and fell heavily to the ground, stunned and motionless. In a little while, however, Mr. Barnes and the guard came up, their horses at full gallop, and were presently followed by a light cart and a post chaise, despatched from the 'Magpie,' as soon after the disappearance of the coach as human hands could get them ready; both Mr. Barnes and the guard having very positively asserted that "Muggins' Gap would be sure to bring them up if they kept on at that pace"—meaning thereby, of course, that Muggins' Gap would be sure to throw them down. Muggins' Gap was that part of the road where the 'Retaliator' opposition coach, driven by one Mr. John Muggins, was overturned some ten days before, and which, by falling into and crushing the hedge, had not only christened the spot, but had also immortalized Mr. Muggins, by handing his name down to posterity. The break made in the hedge, therefore, in the present instance, would of course have been called after Mr. Barnes, although that gentleman was not on duty at the time, had he not pleaded very hard that the subject might be forgotten, as he was not by any means so ambitious as Mr. Muggins. There were some few, however, who always remembered it, and among them the driver of the 'Retaliator,' who never passed the spot without shaking his head, and pointing out to the passengers "Joe Barnes' Gap," and telling the whole story of the runaway of the 'Regulator.'

The 'Dreadful Coach Accident' of course appeared in the papers next day. Child run over, and killed on the spot! The mother both legs broken. One passenger died from injuries consequent upon jumping off; another not expected to survive, in consequence of the coach falling upon him; Thomas Racquet, Esq., of Jermyn Street, broken arm and concussion of the brain, in imminent danger, lying at the Magpie Inn; the rest of the passengers all more or less hurt. Coroner's inquest; deodand upon the coach—(which was never enforced); reprimand to the coachman—(which was). Application respecting dog-carts; and the last new American joke in the next paragraph; and the events of the times rolled on their ceaseless course, and, in a little while, the 'Dreadful Coach Accident' was as little remembered by the public as if it had never occurred.

Mr. Barnes, however, and the guard for ever afterwards made it a point, when they drew up at the Magpie, and proceeded into the bar for their glasses of ale, to lecture the horse-keeper and his helps about looking well after the cattle; and as the horses have not run away with the coach since, they are perfectly satisfied that they have

done all that lies in their power to avoid a recurrence of the disastrous event.

When Tom regained his consciousness, he found himself in a strange bed, with the clean white curtains all drawn closely round him; and, upon endeavouring to move, became painfully sensible that his arm was fractured between the wrist and the elbow, and that, moreover, he was sorely bruised and shaken. For some time the whole string of passed incidents seemed like a troubled and misty dream, until at last Memory awoke from her trance, and presented to his imagination, in full and vivid colours, the little upturned face, crushed out of all form by the grinding wheel, and the low moaning of the man as he lay dying under the weight of the coach, and all the clanking of the harness and furious galloping of the horses; and then poor Tom would faint from very horror at the picture, and only recover to see the same scene, and faint again.

Every day a tall gentlemanly man in black called several times, and administered some soothing compound, from the effects of which Tom at last fell into a deep and refreshing sleep. In about five days after the accident, although excessively weak and exhausted, he began to get anxious about home; and, with his usual impetuosity, after out-arguing the doctor, against whose most positive orders he wished to act, he announced his intention of being removed to Jermyn Street forthwith; and to Jermyn Street therefore was he removed with all due care and celerity.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. HORACE CHUCK.

MENTION has been made in the course of these pages of one Mr Horatio Chuck, partner in the firm of "Whittlebury and Chuck," and the course of our history must now tend in his direction and meddle a little with his affairs. Mr. Horatio—or as he was more generally termed Horace—was a very tall, thin individual, with a very sharp nose, and a very capacious mouth, and a correspondingly broad face. He had also a very stiff and formal method of comporting himself; so much so indeed as to have acquired the somewhat unique soubriquet

of the 'Clock Case'—his superlatively solemn behaviour, we suppose, reminding persons strongly of that sedate piece of furniture; to which may be also added the more illustrious title of 'Old Harry's Darning Needle,' bestowed upon him by Mr. Thomas Racquet, in consequence, as that gentleman alleged, of his predilection for stitching together any little pieces of mischief which Old Time had contrived either to wear out, or cause to be forgotten, in the course of his flight. We will not say that Mr. Thomas Racquet was wrong in his estimation of the character of this worthy; if the truth were told, perhaps he did rather delight in raking up old hostilities; but whether under the idea, that as 'the remembrance of past dangers is sweet,' so must the 'remembrance of past heart-burnings' be also, we are not in a position to determine. In Mr. Thomas Racquet's peculiar case, he certainly made it his most especial care that none of the little peccadilloes (or large either for that matter) of which that young gentleman had been convicted, should be forgotten,—however long ago they might have taken place and been forgiven. Under these circumstances, it is not to be supposed that Mr. Thomas Racquet felt much affection for 'Old Harry's Darning Needle,' or that the Needle itself—(so to speak)—cared much about Tom. In the first and foremost place, Mr. Horace Chuck was not by any manner of means pleased to find—as find he did all in a hurry—that that which he had been in the habit of considering as his moiety of the heart of Caroline Whittlebury, should have been long since secretly monopolized by Mr. Thomas Racquet. It was rather aggravating to his mercantile feelings to be secretly outbid,—and as it were forestalled by a youngster, comparatively a stranger in the market, especially after having so long accustomed himself to consider the prize as his own.

Every Sunday had Mr. Horace Chuck dined at Stamford Hill, and every evening, after the supper consequent thereupon, had he requested the favour of Miss Caroline's tasting his glass of grog for him. Regularly, upon her last four birth-days, had he presented her either with a Forget-Me-Not, a Book of Beauty, or a Musical Bijou; and, upon the last six Lord Mayor's days, had he escorted her through the perils of Cheapside, to see the grand civic procession. He had been in partnership with her father for some years, having succeeded his own father, a very dear friend of old Mr. Whittlebury's; moreover, he remembered the young lady when she wore pinafores, and, as Lord Byron somewhat irreverently expresses it, 'smelt of bread and butter;' had taken her upon his knee many a time; had fetched her home for the

holydays from Miss Francesca Littlechap's Altamont House Academy for Young Ladies; and, in short, had done all sorts of acts and deeds upon which to found claims upon her heart and affections.

It was an unlucky circumstance for Mr. Horace Chuck that he was a great full-grown long-legged fellow, when Caroline was but a child; and that, when she had progressed and improved, and at last put forth her roses and burst into womanhood, that he could not find a young head or two for his own thistles, and so blossom over again likewise, just by way of keeping her company: not that he imagined such an horticultural step necessary; he was perfectly satisfied with things as they were, so completely had he forgotten that the handsome and lively young damsel before him was anything more than the little girl of his acquaintance six years ago, until he was startled from his dream by Mr. Thomas Racquet's most unmistakable attentions.

It is a very dangerous matter for a young gentleman of three or four-and-twenty to become intimately acquainted with a smart little lady, over whose curly head but eleven or twelve summers have rolled their flowery way, especially if he be somewhat of a funny fellow, and living in the same house—playing with edged tools is nothing to it: firstly and foremostly he is perhaps teased and tempted into a romp now and then, —and that too without even the sanction of the misletoe; calls the little damsel 'My dear;' presents her with a doll's house complete; and gets christened some little affectionate by-name for his pains, and innocently enough thinks her a pretty little girl for her age. The 'pretty little girl for her age,' however, gradually, and slyly, and covertly, and with slaughterous thoughts intent, keeps stealing on imperceptibly towards woman's estate, without his dreaming of such a catastrophe, until, all of a sudden, and long before any one is at all prepared for such an astonishment, she bursts forth with a rapidity and brilliancy quite alarming, and the poor wight who has innocently gone on admiring the little girl of his early years, almost at a day's notice, finds himself obliged to capitulate to the beaming beauty of eighteen, and thus loses his heart, and his senses too, perhaps, with a suddenness which almost takes away his breath, and certainly long before he has the slightest notion that either the one or the other are in the smallest possible jeopardy. The Humane Society should look to this. When they have finished their Christmas business of fishing the fellows out of cold water, if they would, as the summer advances, and the 'Love lanes,' 'Lovers' walks,' and other such places get green,

allow some of their officers to keep a good look-out for those poor fellows who are likely to fall into hot water, we have no doubt they would be hailed as a still greater national benefit than they are;—especially if, in addition, they would undertake to label all those ‘pretty little girls of their ages’ who are about to explode into irresistible young ladies, ‘*Dangerous*,’ if it were only for the safety of such purblind middle-aged bachelors as Horace Chuck; leaving the younger ones, whose temerity may tempt them to venture near the spot after the notice, to fall in and be done for, as the reward of their foolhardiness and obstinacy.

Now your little gentleman of twelve,—or boy, or by whatever name you may be pleased to call him,—is far more considerate in his proceedings towards the opposite sex. Nobody in their senses ever thinks of playing too long with him; he is always considered *Dangerous*; he gives such manifest proofs of his intentions of growing up as soon as possible, that nobody is taken in and deceived; he does not, as it were, bottle himself up until he sees an opportunity of alarming his fellows by exploding all of a sudden, but progresses gradually and openly; gives warning, for instance, by cocking his hat, and insisting upon having straps to his trowsers; by throwing off his jacket and sporting a tail, an appendage which no animal in creation but man is without, and which unaccountable omission he always rectifies as soon as possible; shortly after this, he takes to torturing his hair, and coaxing it to hang gracefully down on either side of his face, so as, at a distance, to look as much like whiskers as possible, and then sets up a dazzling satin stock, with a pin, like a beadle’s staff, sticking out of it, and a smart walking cane, with a gilt knob; and evinces an evident propensity to peep under all the bonnets he may meet, provided the owners do not catch him at it. Should such an unfortunate occurrence take place, he blushes immensely, turns away his head, and stutters back in great confusion. Lastly, comes the downy bloom upon the chin, and the incipient whisker, and father’s present of a case of razors—for “he is just eighteen, and quite a man;”—and now, “fore George,” let the ladies look to themselves; it will not have been his fault if they were unaware of his intentions from the first: all of which we consider a much more fair method of proceeding than that which we have described as adopted by the ladies.

Mr. Horace Chuck was, as we have already intimated, very much astounded and taken aback, and most enormously widely awakened, firstly, by finding out all of a sudden that Miss Caroline was no longer

a little girl; and, secondly, by Mr. Thomas Racquet's, as he called them, audacious and preposterous pretensions: if any one had told him, and expected him to believe it, that the Rothschilds had become insolvent, his surprise would scarcely have been greater. When Master Tom's visits to Stamford Hill first became a little frequent, and Mr. Horace had in consequence often met him at the dinner table, certainly feelings of suspicion did begin to germinate in his heart; but they were almost immediately smothered by the thought of the extreme improbability of such a state of things as they pointed at: but not even a suspicion ever entered Horace's head that he himself was in love, as the phrase goes, with the little girl he had once dandled upon his knee, and that all Mr. Thomas's cloakings, and shawlings, and walkings about the garden, were likely to interfere with his own long delayed matrimonial felicity.

We have said that Mr. Horace considered one moiety of the young lady's affections as his own; and so he did, but it was with no thoughts connubial. He liked the young lady as well as such a cucumber of a heart as his would allow him to like anybody; and never dreamed of any one liking her any better; it was, therefore, with no very pleasant feelings that, on one fine summer evening, as he walked into the garden at Stamford Hill, with his hands thrust down to the bottoms of his coat-tail pockets, a favourite attitude of his, and the last inch of a cigar in his mouth, and his broad face turned upwards as he walked, not for the contemplation of the glowing beauty of the evening clouds, as they stole over the calm summer sky, or to watch the pigeons as they described their aerial circles in the sun-beams, but for the more sublunary and practical purpose of preventing the last red-hot half-inch of cigar from burning the tip of his chubby and fat little nose; it was with no very pleasant feelings that he came, just at the end of the long walk, plump, and all of a heap as it were, upon Mr. Thomas Racquet and Miss Caroline Whittlebury, not arm-in-arm, as a *serious* young lady and gentleman should be, but after far more loving fashion; to wit—Mr. Thomas Racquet was leisurely strolling with his arm round the waist of the pretty Caroline;—a freedom which she did not seem at all to resent, but, on the contrary, walked as peaceably through the old shrubbery, (as nice a cool, shady, bowery, little spot as any in Christendom,) as if it were just the very thing of all others she liked best upon earth, with a little light gauze scarf thrown carelessly over her head, and her bonnet hanging from her arm.

Horace brought his eyes to bear in a horizontal direction immediately, and calcined the tip of his nose with the glowing end of the



cigar in a moment ; a little curling wreath of smoke at the same time, mistaking his nostrils for natural chimneys, very unceremoniously attempted an ascent, and greatly added to the discomfiture of the surprised and luckless smoker. With streaming eyes and a half choked expression of countenance, partly occasioned by the smoke, and partly by this unlooked-for vision, he stumbled backwards into a holly bush, to allow the lovers room to pass, treading down the box edging, and murdering half a dozen bachelors' buttons in his confusion ; and there he stood, the very statue of Dismay, until the loving pair had sauntered quietly by : Tom merely giving him a nod as he passed, but without removing his arm from the young lady's waist, or seeming in any way put out by the rencontre ; and Caroline, her colour perhaps a little heightened, carelessly looking at the flowers in the other direction, as coolly and unconcernedly as if he had nothing at all to do with the matter.

Mr. Horace stood for a minute or two thoroughly paralyzed, lifting first one foot and then the other, and driving the heels of his boots viciously deep into the bed upon which he stood, and watching the pair up the walk. How long he might have remained in the same employment seems almost uncertain. A sharp little twig of the holly bush, against which he had placed himself, however, decided the question, by thrusting a bunch of its prickly leaves into his ear, and thus recalling him to himself : he jumped from his thorny bed in haste, whipped himself round in the opposite direction chosen by the lovers, thrust his hands as usual to the very bottoms of his coat-tails, and commenced flogging himself therewith with great zeal and assiduity as he walked towards the house—the bunch of office keys in one pocket, and four-pence halfpenny in the other, keeping up a most exhilarating jingle the whole way.

Back to his lodgings in Nelson Square hied Horace, without even so much as saying adieu to his partner, who was quietly enjoying his nap upon a garden-seat, with his handkerchief thrown over his head to keep the flies off, and little dreaming of the love-making and jealousy going on about him.

With all the speed that a pair of long legs could muster did Horace devour the way. The distance was accomplished in no time ; the house-door was gained, and the panel thereof almost smashed in by the nervous and rattling shower of knocks poured upon it by the excited Horace. His landlady, good Mrs. Boblodge, who had just that moment taken in the mangling, dropt it in the extremity of her

surprise, and opened the door to its full width in order to admit him, fully persuaded that her "First Floor," as she called Mr. Chuck, must either have unexpectedly lost his "seventeen senses,"—(the number she was in the habit of reckoning as usually possessed by mortals,)—or that he must have suddenly come into seventeen thousand a year: nothing less than either one or the other catastrophe would, in her estimation, in any way excuse such a dignified and fiery application of her knocker.

Mr. Horace took no notice of his gaping landlady, but bolted up to his sitting-room three steps at a time, wheeled the easy chair with such a sudden fling directly opposite the ornamentally filled fire-grate, and flung himself into it with such terrific energy, that poor Toby, Mrs. Boblodger's favourite cat, scoured round the room and flew up the window curtains in dismay. Mr. Horace flung his slippers one after the other at puss; and then elevated his heels one upon each hob, and stared as hard at the paper shavings as if they had been fierce and burning Walls Ends, and Mr. Thomas Racquet were in the middle of them.

Suddenly rising and snatching off the hat of a little China Buonaparte, which ornamented the mantel-shelf, he extracted from the body thereof a lucifer, and giving it a vicious scratch down the back of the figure, lit a cigar, and threw the match into the fire-grate, which of course immediately set fire to the beautifully curled and flowing paper of various colours with which Mrs. Boblodger had decorated that part of his apartment.

Now, a comparison might have been drawn by the wickedly disposed between the passion of Mr. Horace Chuck and that little brimstone-tipped parallelogram of timber; they might have insinuated, that the fervour of the one, like the fire of the other, would have remained for ever in themselves concealed, but for the fortuitous circumstances which had just brought them both to light. To a certain degree, such comparison, however odious, might be correct; as, supposing Mr. Horace to be the timber or stick, and that curious little blue-looking substance his long concealed love, the scratch or rub administered to the compound, by his falling in with Tom, had certainly caused it to explode and burn with all that intensity and smoke for which those little 'Lucifers' are so pleasantly notorious.

Mr. Chuck threw the burning papers together under the grate by means of the bright steel summer poker,—the polished surface of which had never been soiled by smoke before, and which was never intended to

be so soiled at all, having been kept all the winter carefully rolled up in wash-leather and pomatum,—and ordered the shutters to be shut and the candles brought, and his supper prepared—all within an hour; although the “ruddy king of day,” as Tom used, in complimentary strain, to call the sun, had scarcely drawn the last of his glowing train beneath the horizon.

All was done as the gentleman desired. The “ruddy king of day” had the shutters despitefully shut almost in the face of his train, and Gloom, with a couple of sulkily burning candles to light him, took possession of the chamber. And dingy, and dreary enough the chamber looked.

Horace gazed sternly at the walls of his apartment, but found no solace therefrom. The twining pattern of the paper twisted itself into all sorts of fantastic faces,—grinning, jeering, and triumphant, and all bearing most exasperating likenesses of Mr. Thomas Racquet. He stared at the ceiling,—but a blank is never consoling under any circumstances; at the rings upon the curtain rods,—but, alas! they were but as so many wedding-rings hung high and far beyond his reach; at the golden eagle perched on the top of the antiquated mirror, holding a little golden ball, suspended by a chain, ready to drop it upon his devoted head for questioning the truth of the reflections over which it presided, reducing him, as they did, to a size less than he had ever observed them to do before; at the burned paper in the grate, emblem, alas! of the ruin of his once gay hopes: but nothing comforted him. All—all to his eyes seemed to wear a wish-you-may-get-it kind of look; all—all seemed to remind him that he had been most certainly and unequivocally ‘cut out.’ He folded his arms and frowned upon the little figure of Napoleon, which stood very respectfully with its hat off gazing blandly upon him, and seemingly full of pity for his defeat. Horace immediately put its hat on again, wrong-side foremost, and pushed it indignantly back to its place; the calm gloom of its countenance disturbed him. At last, the servant, all smiles as usual, brought in his supper, but was soon glad to make a precipitate retreat again, protesting to her mistress, as she passed her on the top of the stairs, that Mr. Chuck “had a’most snapped her head off.”

Horace sat down to his supper: the mirror, although it had, when consulted, diminished his image, had not diminished his appetite. The broiled bone and bottled porter soon began to feel the force of his sentimental attacks. He ate for some time in silence; staring at the unsnuffed candles, and pondering deeply. Suddenly, however, he broke

forth: "I do not exactly wish that Tom Racquet any harm," said Mr. Chuck, telling a lie to begin with, and speaking very slowly, driving the words out from between his teeth, and making them hiss again as they escaped one by one. "I do not wish that Tom Racquet exactly any very great harm, but——"

The extent of his good wishes were not, however, destined for the public ear. The sentence was stayed in the middle, and the warm-hearted wisher drew the edge of his knife backwards and forwards across the splintered and jagged end of the marrow-bone, thereby creating a sound which seemed to afford him peculiar pleasure. Having done this in a particularly slow and solemn manner several times, he set to work again in right down savage earnest, and hacked, and cut, and tugged at the bone until he was fairly out of breath, and was constrained to rest awhile.

"I do not wish him any great harm," said Horace, resuming after one or two long respirations, and leaning back in his chair for a few minutes; "but——"

The unlucky bone was again seized and knocked about most furiously; and a snug little piece, which had hitherto escaped his notice, dug at and wrenched off with tremendous ferocity; but still the sentence remained unfinished: it was evidently quite a mystery what Mr. Chuck *did* wish Mr. Racquet, if he did not wish him any harm. He, however, paused for a while, keeping his eye upon the bone in wolfish meditation.

"I wish I had him here," said Horace, with a sudden start as the idea of the marrow presented itself; and again was the attack made with redoubled vigour. The spoon was seized, and the bone knocked into an upright position, and emptied of its contents, with the same hurried and North American Indian fashion which had characterized the rest of his supper proceedings. At last, giving the thrice-sacked dainty a finishing tap, after peeping into it like an old magpie, he pushed it from him, and concluded his supper, leaving the amount of good he had been wishing to Mr. Thomas Racquet during its progress a mere matter of speculation. A glass of brandy and water cold, with which he finished his repast, failed to restore his equanimity, and Mr. Horace Chuck went to bed in immense dudgeon with himself and all the world.

Day after day did this amiable fit keep possession of Mr. Horace Chuck, until poor Mrs. Boblodger was almost distracted and frightened out of her wits. Contrary to his usual wont, would he come home

early, and walk about his apartment with heavy footsteps; contrary to his usual wont, would he snap and snarl at the maid until she was, as she feelingly, although, perhaps, somewhat ambiguously, expressed herself, quite "scarified" at going near him; contrary to his usual wont, would he salute 'Toby' with a furious "Whisht, Cat! Whir-r-r—whisht!" accompanied by a stray boot or a slipper every time his furry nose peeped round the corner of the sitting-room door. Nor were matters at the office much better than at home. Poor old Sanderson, the messenger, despite his corns and his rheumatism, was hunted about to all sorts of places at all sorts of distances; while young Sanderson, who was especially retained to save the old man a little, was discharged. Atkins and Brown, the clerks, according to their own accounts, were driven, and bullied, and brow-beaten in true slave-state fashion, and came to the determination of quitting "Jamaica," as they called the counting-house, as soon as possible. Nor did Mr. Whittlebury himself totally escape his partner's distemperament: that gentleman more than once received such decided rebuffs and growls in return for his invitations to Stamford Hill, that he at last desisted from more communication than was absolutely necessary for carrying on the business. Altogether, Mr. Horace Chuck had become not exactly the sort of person one would like to be up in a balloon with for any length of time.

'Slow and sure!' is a very excellent maxim in its way; and, doubtless, very applicable to many occasions in life. Mr. Chuck, indeed, felt so fully confident in the efficacy of the principle it inculcated, that he had never acted upon any other. It had been taught him by his respected grandmother, of happy memory, and he had had her solemn asseveration for its infallibility.

He had, of late, however, discovered that this, like all other arbitrary rules, had its exception. He had found out, and each time to his cost, that both in the cases of young ladies and steamers, it was not, perhaps, the most efficacious mode of proceeding; if he wanted to catch either of them, he must make haste, run, bolt, fly, go like a sky-rocket. The steamers, perhaps, if amiable steamers, might give "half a turn a-starn" in his favour, and take him in after they had started; but the young ladies, be they never so amiable, invariably decline. Once behind time there, and the chance is gone for ever.

But, luckily for this many phased world, and the little forked animals who so restlessly scramble over its surface, no storm lasts for ever. A commotion in the Atlantic—a row in the one shilling gallery—a hurri-

cane, and a washing-day, all have an end; and Mr. Chuck's mental gloom, like each of these grand phenomena, had an end also, greatly to the delight of his landlady, and her cat, and her servant, and Brown, Atkins, and old Sanderson, and their master Mr. Whittlebury. With regard to Tom Racquet, however, the storm which had agitated the breast of Mr. Horace Chuck was not over; a temporary lull had indeed taken place, but that was all. The storm itself, metaphorically speaking, was in bottles, securely corked, and waxed, and wired down, and stowed away in the deepest and darkest recess of Mr. Horace Chuck's mental cellar, there to lie until a proper time should come for discharging it with full force and effect.

It was the consciousness of being in possession of this rich store, perhaps, which gave Mr. Chuck, after he had got rid of his gloom, such a self-satisfied swagger, which added a little more to the heavenward inclination in the tip of his nose, and increased in a considerable degree the loudness of his voice. Like a man with a well filled-purse or a goodly income, he felt more confidence in himself, from the knowledge of the animating fact, and laughed, and walked fiercely, and at last screwed himself up to the point of "not caring a fig for all the Caromes and Toms in the world," with tremendous energy and effect.

CHAPTER VII.

JERMYN STREET, AND THE WHITTLEBURYS AND AUNT LUCY.

Tom had scarcely arrived in Jermyn Street, and taken possession of his own bed, (for the journey had fatigued him, in spite of all his arguments that it would not,) before the curtains were slightly opened by a small white hand. A pale sweet face, a little antique, leaned gently over him, and a pair of mild blue eyes peeped kindly at him over a pair of gold spectacles, and from under a straw bonnet with a long white veil.

"My dear Aunt Lucy, how kind of you!" said Tom, suddenly getting up on his elbow in agreeable surprise, and as suddenly dropping down again from excessive pain.

"Do not talk just now, there's a dear boy," said Aunt Lucy, in reply. "We only saw the account by accident this morning, or I should have been with you sooner. I arrived at the 'Maggie' just in time to learn of your foolish move here; if you had moved any where,

you should have returned to Coddlethorpe: however, lie still, and we'll soon have you to rights again—Old Maids are capital nurses, you know, Tom." And Aunt Lucy rattled on famously by way of raising the patient's spirits a little, and bustled about, and began to make herself quite at home in the sick bachelor's apartment. Having fully satisfied her good-natured self that her nephew was not likely to leave the land of the living in consequence of his accident, she set to work to procure a lodging, in which she succeeded both to her own and the landlady's entire satisfaction, by engaging the ground-floor immediately under her nephew's apartments.

A great deal, however, required to be done before Aunt Lucy could comfortably take possession of her quarters. There were the key-holes to be stuffed up, and there was the chimney-board of the bed-room to be fitted more closely, and there were sand-bags to be made for the windows, and rollers for the bottoms of the doors; besides the many yards of gilt leather which were to be nailed round the edges and along the tops of the said doors, and in the nailing of which Aunt Lucy made herself very hot—for she was a little impatient and impetuous, like her nephew, and would not wait for the carpenter, and so hammered away with a very large hammer which she borrowed from the landlady, and fixed the leather all on one side, and so had to take it all off again, and missed the nails and hit her fingers, and let the heavy hammer fall upon her toes, and did all sorts of things not at all calculated to expedite her operations, and finally consigned hammer, nails, leather, and carpenter, all to her favourite city of "Jericho," with as much ill temper as she was capable of, which was, to say the most of it, but a very little after all. Leaving the good lady, however, for a while to keep sentinel over her dreaded enemies—the "drafts," we will take a peep at Stamford Hill and the Whittleburys.

Old Mr. Whittlebury and his warm-hearted little daughter were sitting at their breakfast a few mornings after Tom's return, and had evidently been talking over that young gentleman's many eccentricities, more especially that one which had procured him the distinguished honour of an appearance in a police court.

"I am quite sure it was him, my dear Carry," said the old gentleman, as he leaned over the table, and tapped his empty cup gently with the spoon, to remind his fair daughter that she was forgetting him.

"Yes, but Pa', dear, it *could* not be," replied Caroline, sweetening her Papa's coffee twice over, and with a very emphatic stress upon the verb; "because I *know* he would be at his Aunts at the time, or nearly

so; and, besides, he *never* gets tipsy, Pa', dear—he has told me so many a time himself. Oh! I'm sure—nay, I'm quite positive it could not have been Tom, Pa', dear."

"You are a little fool, Carry," was her Papa's no very complimentary reply. "I tell you again and again it *was* Tom; and, what is more, I tell you that I do not intend his visits here to continue. I will not have a common street-brawler for a son-in-law; and you will do well to consider how you will like such a character for a husband; for I suppose that is what all this walking, and talking, and visiting of yours and his is intended to conclude with."

Caroline put her handkerchief to her eyes, and said nothing; while the old gentleman, after infusing the necessary quantum of acid into his usually good-natured countenance, deliberately unfolded the morning-paper, and proceeded to read the list of bankrupts, the City article, the prices of stock, the state of the markets, and other business-like scraps, while his pretty daughter sat weeping silently and painfully, and revolving in her mind numberless schemes for softening the heart of her obdurate Papa, and reforming the somewhat lax moral code of her dear Tom, in case the odious story of Mr. Thomas Smith and the oyster argument at the Police Office should, by any unhappy chance, prove to be true.

Beauty in tears! What can she not effect? Her power is confessedly unlimited, and her triumphs are not to be told, for they generally happen in secret; and far be it from us to withdraw the veil. But Beauty in tears very naturally reminds us of Beauty in smiles—who among us has not marked her magic influence *then*? '*Place aux dames*,' is conceded with the greatest alacrity, as she proceeds upon her walk. The dashing young spark, with the eye-glass screwed into the side of his nose, steps incontinently to the swollen and dirty gutter, and damages the splendid polish of his boots beyond all redemption, in order that she may pass on in safety. The little fat old gentleman essays to pass his umbrella directly over her head, although she is at least by a good twelve inches the taller, without calculating the parasol—but short people always do persist in trying to lift their umbrellas over the heads of all the tall people they meet, so that, perhaps, this goes for nothing; but then the smile with which he greets her as the parasol and the umbrella come in contact, and which not even the sprinkling of the wet, caused by the collision, can totally subdue, that certainly must pass for something. Barclay and Perkins' sturdy draymen, too, forget their independence as she approaches, and slacken their ropes for her to step over, and trip

up the next smartly attired young gentleman, by way of making up for lost time. The elderly sweep is transfixed with admiration, and almost runs against her in his anxious endeavours to avoid soiling her dress, as they each make several ineffectual attempts to pass. The man at the crossing, into whose hat she drops a penny, forgets for a moment to dive after the numismatic specimen, and follows her with his eyes until she has safely arrived on the opposite pavement; and then the smart shopman, at whose emporium of fashion she supplies herself with all those little aggravating flirtables, which so prettily become her estate,—polite in the extreme is the shopman; he bows and smiles, as he hands her the required articles, taking every opportunity, between whiles, when he fancies she is not looking, to adjust his hair by running his fingers through it—to pull up his shirt-collar, whereof the corners are sometimes a little limp, and *will* hang down in spite of him, and to settle his coat, and pull his waistcoat straight, and lash the dust from his boots with his handkerchief, and to go through many other manœuvres, all tending to the enhancement of his personal appearance (in his own conceit, of course). The very scavenger, as she approaches, turns himself half round, in order to hide an unseemly patch in the rear of his red-plush indispensables, and shovels up the mud with a more graceful sweep; in short, there is nothing which either looks well or acts well, in ordinary routine, but what is intended both to look better and act better when a pretty girl is by. We ourselves, despite our editorial dignity, once felt the influence we are describing, and we are proud to confess it. We well remember meeting a ‘certain young lady’ (now our lady wife,) when we unfortunately had on our oldest of all old coats: our first thought was to remove the iron coal-plate in the pavement, and vanish instantly down the aperture; but we were in fear, lest she should tumble down after, and discover us; and so we looked abroad for a shop or a turning, but there was neither, the street was a private one—(Harley Street); it would not do to run down the area steps of one of the houses, and get into the coal-scuttle—the ladies’ maid might suspect us of a descent upon her mistress’s diamonds. We could with pleasure have jumped into the baker’s basket, which was standing at a door, or have run any where or done anything to render our confoundedly shabby bit of ‘invisible green’ more invisible still. ‘Tis passing strange!—the influence of beauty—passing strange! But we must get back to the Whittleburys, nevertheless.

The old gentleman read on, leaning back in his easy chair until his arms ached with holding the paper. He then spread it out upon the table, rested his elbows, and, tucking the first finger of his left hand comfortably behind his ear, went to work with the air of a man bent upon some serious undertaking, as in truth he was—parliamentary speeches in those days being no more celebrated for their perspicuity than they are in the present; and the old gentleman had commenced upon one which had detained an honourable member upon his legs for three mortal hours—coughs, and a-hems, and little hesitating stutterings included.

Caroline sipped her coffee and wept—while her papa sipped his and read. The one, although she really did feel grieved and unhappy, was not able totally to suppress the desire of watching the effect her tears were making upon her Papa, so she peeped with one little watery eye over her handkerchief; while Papa, who set himself up for a stoic, occasionally fidgetted a great deal in his chair, and missed a line every now and then in the speech, thereby creating a desperate confusion in the paragraphs of the honourable member's oration.

At last, Caroline grew tired of sobbing and peeping, and so took to sighing, and rolling the corners of her handkerchief up into tight little knots, and now and then venturing a glance upon that compartment of the widely spread paper, which lay immediately under her eye. The 'Dreadful Coach Accident,' as the stars would have it, met her gaze: to read it carelessly was but the work of a minute—and to give one bitter little scream, clasp her hands convulsively, and fall fainting into her chair, was but the work of another. The old gentleman started to his feet in surprise, stared for an instant at the drooping form of his daughter, and stuttered forth his interrogatories as to the cause of her sudden alarm; but receiving no answer, and not being by any means able to divine the cause of the mischief, he seized the bell-pull violently, and pulled it as it had never been pulled before, or was likely to be again for some time to come—the first jerk bringing it down about his ears.

Mary, the maid, who held it as a point of domestic discipline never to answer the bell until its tintinabulary clatter had ceased, merely remarked quietly to herself, when the summons reached her, "that Master was in one of his 'tantrums' ag'in," and continued paring the apples for dinner, until the rattle of the bell had gradually died away, when she condescended to move. Just, however, as this period

arrived, she was sorely dismayed by the voice of her master storming over the banisters, and calling lustily for water. Mary instantly seized a pail, and screaming, "Fire!" with all her might, ran up stairs.

"You consummate fool, hold your tongue, do!" said her Master, as the handmaiden reached the top of the stairs. "Where is the water? Your mistress has fainted."

"Lor, sir! I thought the parlour was a-fire," replied Mary. "Hadn't I better come in and help?" and she followed her Master into the room; when, between them, Caroline's wandering senses were recalled. "Poor—poor Tom!" said she, crying bitterly, and this time without the slightest disposition to peep over the handkerchief. "Poor—poor Tom, to be killed so!"

"Killed! Tom killed! How?—when?" exclaimed old Mr. Whittlebury in great distress and amazement, while all his best feelings towards Tom returned with tenfold vigour, and instantly dislodged all the rancour which had been accruing in his heart since the unfortunate police business.

"Oh, Pa', dear, he has been killed by the coach upsetting!" sobbed poor Caroline, in answer to her father's many anxious questions, and she pointed out the paragraph in the paper.

"Good Heavens!" said the old gentleman, after having read it in great haste. "I will set off immediately to Jermyn Street, and learn the particulars of all this; these newspapers are such desperate liars, especially over accidents and offences, that there is no believing half they say;" and so endeavouring to comfort both his daughter and himself by vilifying the penny-a-liners of the public press, and dispatching Mary, in the first instance, up-stairs after his hat-brush, and, secondly, into the back parlour after his stick, and then bustling himself into all the corners of the room after his snuff-box, the old gentleman got himself ready to start in time to catch Hendrick's half-past nine o'clock coach at the Clapton turnpike.

"Werry sorry, sir," said Mr. Hendrick, as the old gentleman scrambled up upon the wheel preparatory to mounting the roof, "no room, sir; this here place is Mr. Goodwin's, sir, a reg'lar customer—(with a stress upon the reg'lar);—can't disappoint him at no price, sir."

"My good fellow," began Mr. Whittlebury, "I am in great haste, and I know Mr. Goodwin will readily excuse you in the present instance."

"Can't help it, sir," said the knight of the whip, with something like a malicious grin upon his dirty face. "Briar will be up directly,

and you always goes by him, you know, sir. Briar aint gone up yet, has he, Bill?" continued Mr. Hendrick, addressing the man at the gate-house, and moving his horses on gently at the same time.

"Gone this five minits," growled he of the gate, without either turning his head, or taking his hands out of his apron pockets.

"In course he has," muttered Mr. Hendrick to himself. "I know'd as much; but blow'd if I take you, though, for all that. You're so precious fond o' Briar, you should look out for him, old feller;" and away rattled the worthy, jerking up his elbow and elevating his whip at every pedestrian upon the road, until he picked up two stray customers, and filled up the vacant places just within sight of Mr. Whittlebury.

The old gentleman fretted and fumed at his own misfortune in having missed his regular conveyance, and stormed and swore famously at the impertinence of the opposition; and then remembering that there was nothing "up the road" for a good half-hour at the least, set stoutly forward, determined to walk the distance, which he in due time accomplished, after having his pocket picked close by Shoreditch Church, and getting tremendously hustled and abused for stumbling against an apple-stall, in endeavouring to get out of the way of a kicking horse at the corner of Princes Street. Two hours, or thereabout, after he started from Stamford Hill, he found himself safely seated in Mr. Thomas Racquet's apartments in Jermyn Street, very hot and very dusty from his walk, and most superlatively cross at the loss of his pocket-handkerchief.

CHAPTER VIII.

AUNT LUCY AND MR. WHITTLEBURY.

As soon as Mr. Whittlebury had recovered a little from the fatigue of his walk, and had made the requisite inquiries of the attendant hand-maiden touching the well-being of Mr. Thomas, and had also received the welcome information that a broken arm was the only serious result of the accident, he began casting his eyes round the apartment, and curling up his nose, and pishing and pshawing, and giving forth many symptoms of dissatisfaction,—in the first place at a pair of foils and a rifle, and, secondly, at a broken long-bow—for Tom, among his many accomplishments, was a Toxophilite; and then at a pile of newspapers

and Sporting Magazines, with a very dashing looking flute lying on the top of them, and then at a few prints and a pair of boxing gloves lying on one of the chairs; but, most of all, at two full-length plaster figures of the all-enchanting Mademoiselles Taglioni and Fanny Elsler in their most fascinating attitudes, which were standing upon the table among a heterogeneous mass of little bits of sealing wax, old pens, pieces of red tape, fish-hooks, old kid gloves, and all sorts of *et cætera*, of the like ornamental description. The two prints also of the same ladies in highly transparent muslin, which decorated the walls, seemed to add to the displeasure which the other contents of the bachelor's apartment had conjured up in the old gentleman's mind: all his love for Tom was fast taking flight again. If Tom had been going to die forthwith, all these little signs of his taste and habits would have passed unnoticed, and a large amount of kindness and love been at his service immediately,—which, in that event occurring, Tom of course could very well have dispensed with; but as Tom was declared out of all danger, and likely to get well very soon, all these little signs of his taste and habits were arrayed against him, and the large amount of kindness and love which were at his disposal at first, gradually diminished as the chances of his being able to appreciate them increased.

Now the old gentleman was quite one of the old school, as he called himself; and, moreover, one of those who would have all their juvenile acquaintances believe that they never had been young, and never had played cricket, shot, or fished, kissed a pretty girl, or had done anything else but attend to business all day long—and all night too; and as to plaster casts of young dancing ladies in abbreviated draperies!—bless us! no such matters could of course be suspected of ever entering their thoughts for an instant! Hence, then, the horror and dismay with which old Mr. Whittlebury glanced at these little ornaments of Tom's *sanctum*.

“Confound him!” said the old gentleman, advancing to the table, and eyeing the figure of poor Taglioni with infinite scorn. “The young dog—not at all sorry he’s a little hurt; teach him to be steady—dare say he was driving the coach himself. Must keep him from Caroline though; all this police-officing, and tom-foolery, and that trumpery theatrical nonsense,—(another glance at poor Mademoiselle,)—will never do. Guns, bows, flutes, boxing-gloves, and what-d’ye-call’ums,—(nodding significantly at Fanny Elsler on the table,)—enough to break any steady girl’s heart in a week;” and the more the old gentleman looked about him, the firmer he made up his mind that Tom

must be forbidden the house; and the more cross and scandalous he became. "He's too much of a *gentleman*," said the old man by way of wind-up, and with a very vicious emphasis upon the word—"Too much of a *gentleman* for such plain people as we are; and those three old cats of Aunts of his that he's always talking about, I dare say are no better than regular opera-going, sight-seeing, flimsy, fashionable rousing card-playing old tabbies. Coddlethorpe Hall, too—all stuff! half sold, mortgaged to pay debts of honour and villanous milliners' bills. Won't do: must put a stop to all further nonsense;" and the old gentleman put on his broad-brimmed hat with a very fierce and resolute air, and moved towards the room-door, casting over his shoulder one last withering look at the unhappy Mademoiselle Taglioni as he went.

Just as he reached within a foot of the door, and before he had quite finished withering Mademoiselle, the door was opened from the outside somewhat suddenly and briskly; and the old gentleman, being very close to it, and, moreover, looking another way, received a rather smart blow therewith upon the tip of his nose, which brought his hand up to the defence of that organ, and his eyes in the direction of the door-way with marvellous celerity.

A lady of "about-thirty," which of course means any age between fifty and a hundred, entered, who seemed a little surprised at finding a gentleman alone in the apartment; but gradually recovering herself, apologized for bringing the door into such smart contact with his face, professed ignorance of his presence, and begged him to be seated.

"Mrs. Martin," the landlady of the house, thought Mr. Whittlebury, as he took his hand from his nose, and resumed his seat, "and a very good-looking respectable sort of woman she seems—one who has evidently seen better times;" acting upon this idea, the old gentleman was very condescending and affable, and received the lady's circumstantial account of Tom's accident with great suavity of demeanour, and even joined her at last in a wish for his speedy recovery.

The lady of "about thirty" and old Mr. Whittlebury sat chatting about Tom, and upon the state of the weather, for a full half hour, at the expiration of which time the old gentleman rose to depart, remarking as he walked towards the door, in a tone of voice rather admonitory and condescending than otherwise, "that if Mr. Racquet did not speedily get better, the Old Ladies at the hall must be informed of his state of health."

"Sir!" replied the lady, with a slight appearance of surprise.

"Oh! I was merely remarking, Mrs. Martin," continued Mr. W.

in the same bland and impressive manner, "that the old girls, his Aunts, had better be advised of his condition; they are three confoundedly quizzical old tabbies, by all account, and may take it into their heads ——"

Mr. Whittlebury stopped short in the middle of his sentence, for a very curious expression which was playing about the mild countenance of the lady arrested his attention, and somewhat alarmed him; a slight blush had suddenly suffused the features but half a minute before so delicately pale, and the figure of the lady also had undergone a slight alteration; it was, if possible, a little more upright, and certainly a *little* more dignified and stately: she had evidently drawn herself up to her full height, and just a shade or so beyond it.

Mr. Whittlebury felt, all in a minute, and without knowing why or wherefore, exceedingly uncomfortable; the lady's look completely iced him, and he wished himself safe outside the door, and half way down Jermyn Street at least. Her dignity, however, gradually relaxed, and Mr. Whittlebury's condescending fit as gradually evaporated. She slightly and slowly bent forward, and quietly remarked that she feared he was mistaken; her name was *not* Martin.

The old gentleman had stood with his lips apart, and his eyes fixed, and had mechanically bent forward as the lady bent, in some wonder as to what all this stiffness and frigidity could possibly mean; it was *now*, however, his turn to blush, which he did most intensely; an idea suddenly rushed upon his mind—there was evidently a likeness to Mr. Thomas Racquet in the mild and delicate looking countenance before him. How could he have been so stupid as not to have seen it before. How vexatious, and annoying, and tiresome; and Mr. Whittlebury bowed, or rather bobbed, in a very hurried and perturbed manner, and with none of his usual ease and grace, and dropped his stick and picked it up again, and then dropped his hat, and then attempted to apologize, and commenced retreating backwards towards the passage, bobbing and bowing as he went, and altogether evincing so many pitiable symptoms of distress at his unfortunate allusion to the "three quizzical old tabbies," that Aunt Lucy quite felt for him, and could not prevent breaking into a smile; so she begged in most winning tones that he would not think anything more of the matter, and furthermore informed him that she considered herself fortunate in being able to lay claim to a position among the happy sisterhood of "old tabbies," provided that by that somewhat eccentric term he meant Old Maids, and that she was not by any means ashamed of the title,

with much more to the same effect, all intended to convince her hearer that she would not have changed her condition if she could, and was very much inclined to make a vigorous resistance, even now should any person have the temerity to attempt to persuade her otherwise.

While the maiden of the house was considering the policy of answering the bell, Aunt Lucy walked down stairs with Mr. Whittlebury, in order to show him properly out, and see that he did not steal the great coats, for she had heard of gentlemanly men calling at houses, and in fits of abstraction encasing themselves in other people's garments, and walking away with the same. Never was there a lobby, for a short one, so long as that between the foot of the stairs and the street-door, and never was there a street-door so difficult to open as that one particular street-door on that particular morning. The old gentleman laid violent hands upon the rusty old iron knob of the huge door-lock, and attempted to draw it back, but it moved not, it was already back as far as it would go, and was held in that position by a hook; he looked at the two great bolts, and half suspected them of maliciously wishing to keep him in possession,—but no, they were evidently withdrawn; at last a little latch, with a smart well-polished brass knob, just under the great lock, and almost hidden in its shadow, attracted his attention, and he seized it with avidity, just at the very moment that Aunt Lucy, seeing him at fault, seized it also; their hands met upon the little brass knob, and then both immediately relinquished it and bowed, and then both again made another attempt, and as suddenly desisted and bowed again: however, the door was opened at last, and with a little bit of a stumble consequent upon getting his toe into a hole in the mat, old Mr. Whittlebury emerged into the street, heartily glad to get away, and very unhappy at having committed the solecism of calling an interesting lady of about thirty by so opprobrious an epithet as “a quizzical old tabby,” and that to her very face;—and a “very good-looking, mild, gentle face it is too,” thought the old gentleman, as he retraced his steps down Waterloo Place.

It was not, however, until he had got quite clear of town, and had once again breathed the pure air of his favourite suburb, that he perfectly recovered his usual elasticity of spirits: the thoughts which chased each other through his mind during the ride were of a very mingled and desultory description; among the most prominent, however, was a decided admiration of the “quizzical old tabby” whom he had just left, but under which title he could not for the soul of him

now bring himself to class her: Old Maids rose in his estimation full fifty per cent upon the moment; in fact the matter has not by any means been clearly ascertained whether he had not, in his mind's eye, entirely obliterated the term from his vocabulary, as well as extirpated the race from the face of the earth, substituting "unmarried lady" for the rejected title, and classing all maids equally among the most blooming of the youth of the age, without reference to the number of summers which might have shed their sweetness round their brows.

Mr. Whittlebury communed with himself, and made up his mind that he had been very stupid, and must have looked particularly foolish, and that it was due to himself, in justice to his character as a gentleman, that he should take an early opportunity of revisiting Jermyn Street, and explaining more at length, and apologizing more profoundly, for the little *contre-temps* of which he had been guilty;—and so he comforted himself, and knocked at his own door at Stamford Hill. Aunt Lucy, when Mr. Erasmus Whittlebury had at last bowed and stammered himself out of the house, walked mechanically to the window, wondering who he could be; and then began to feel highly amused at his evident distress and total loss of presence of mind;—she could not, she confessed, see why he should have classed her and her sisters among the Old Maids of the realm, and had rather than otherwise, perhaps, that he had not,—not that she cared about it, not in the least; but nevertheless, she did not see any business he had to make any such remark: but never mind, she had had her revenge upon him; he certainly had looked extremely foolish and perplexed, and it served him very right too; and so she wound up her thoughts by looking out at the window. The old gentleman was proceeding up the street, and Aunt Lucy's looks proceeded in that direction likewise. The old gentleman was a good figure, and walked with a firm and manly step; but we take it upon our veracity, nevertheless, to state that she saw him not, and as to his firm and manly step, that it dwelt not in her memory: he bowed and shook hands with an acquaintance at the top of the street; the bow *was* graceful, and the ceremony of parting evidently *comme il faut*;—but we again say the circumstance passed unnoticed before her eyes, although they were, as we have already intimated, bent upon the very spot.

We have nearly made up our minds to risk our solemn asseveration that Aunt Lucy did not take up this particular position, (which commanded, as the military folks have it, the whole line of street,)

for the sake of watching her late companion in his progress. Our reasons are strong for holding such an opinion, and are founded of course upon our highly favoured position with the fair sex, and the valuable store of knowledge that proud position has enabled us to collect, touching their natural history and habits; in fact our studies go far to prove that the dear creatures never do esconce themselves snugly just behind the drawing-room curtains, or behind the parlour blinds, to have a sly peep at any specimen of the *genus homo* whatsoever,—let him be ever so handsome, or his whiskers ever so unexceptionable. If by chance some fair form may occasionally be seen half enveloped in the muslin hangings of the first floor, it is but for the better and more tasteful arrangement of the *bouquet* which graces the little table by the window, or for a little gentle chat with the pet canary in his golden cage; and should again by any rare, we may say very rare occurrence, a flashing beam from some beauteous eye, like the splendid fire of a transcendent diamond, dart its ray through the long green Venetian laths which protect the basement story of the mansion, it is but for a clearer view, and a more intense study of the half dozen ornithological specimens, in the forms of sparrows, which may happen to be hopping about in the road—pity it should be so thrown away, by the by. If, however, there be any he-creature sufficiently obtuse as to be unconvinced of these truthful allegations, let him but try the experiment and judge for himself; let him direct his eye to the window, if he be passing at the very moment when the beautifully-rounded arm is raised to the cage, in the one instance, or meet the glance of the beaming eye through the blinds in the other, and the chances are, that he will be forthwith convinced, by ocular demonstration, that the opposite houses, or the sky, or the paving-stones, or the sparrows, are far more thought of than himself; and if he still doubt the fact, let him make a full stop directly opposite, when the truth of our deductions will be finally impressed upon his mind by the closing of the curtains, the turning of the blinds, and the instant vanishment of the charmers from their immediate vicinity.

Aunt Lucy, after she had sufficiently examined the paving-stones in the middle of the street,—(there were no sparrows,)—and reviewed the pavement on both sides of the way, gave one concluding glance up at the sky, and returned to Tom's chamber, where she related how an old gentleman, whose name she had not learned, had called to inquire after his health, and made himself very rude and ridiculous;

of which Tom took but slight notice, fancying, no doubt, that it must have been old Dunneley, the tailor, come again after his little bill.

Several more days passed heavily over the sick man's chamber; Aunt Lucy reading and nursing, and Tom grumbling and dozing, and getting heartily tired of the monotonous sameness of the room. The doctor and the hairdresser came and went with the regularity of clock-work, and totally lost their interest; continually tracing the same pattern upon the bed-curtains, and the walls, and the carpet, with his eye, afforded Tom no amusement, and yet he could scarcely refrain from doing so; the solo performances of the scrubbing-brush upon the stairs and landing-place outside his room door, with the sharp rattle of its nose when driven desperately into all sorts of impracticable corners failed to entertain him; the testy young gentleman who lived in the 'uppermost room,' and who always went out early, and invariably contrived to stumble over a large superannuated tin dust-pan, and a picturesque banister-brush, which were always left upon the middle stair of his particular flight, and who always made a point of sending them flying all the way down stairs before him, with a storm of kicks and execrations at their careless or mischievous owner; even this young gentleman's funny irritability at last failed to bring a smile upon Tom's countenance, and although gradually recovering from the effects of his accident, he was getting daily and hourly more unhappy and dispirited, and at last fell into a state of dozing melancholy. From this, however, he was at last happily roused by a mechanical individual sharpening a saw just beneath his bed-room window. All at once Tom bethought him that he had been laid up now nearly a month, and neither old Mr. Whittlebury nor his dear Caroline had been near him, or inquired after him, or written to him, or taken any notice of him whatever; and he considered this conduct "confoundedly strange" on the part of the old gentleman, and "remarkably unkind" on the part of the young lady, and began puzzling his brains mightily to account for the same, but to no purpose. His Aunt regularly informed him of the calls made by his friends, the Rattletons, and Bob Philpotts, and of their repeated struggles to reach his bed-chamber; and she would doubtless, Tom thought, have mentioned the name of Whittlebury, had that gentleman been there, notwithstanding the decided antipathy she had expressed at his forming any close connexion with the family; and so Tom made up his mind that something must be the matter, and he would write and inquire.

The first opportunity which occurred, therefore, occasioned by his Aunt's absence upon a morning walk, Tom got out of bed, and taking a pen in his left hand (thereby discovering for the first time in his life the inconvenience of having such an uneducated member of his body corporate), contrived to indite two epistles, the one flowery and glowing, but slightly tinted with reproach to his "dear Carry," and the other sober, and staid, and steady, to her Papa;—his Papa-in-law, as he still hoped he would be, despite the opposition of his Aunts; and having despatched the two letters per post, calmly returned to his quarters.

The next morning, Tom was more fidgetty and anxious than ever. With the doctor he was very short, and with the barber he was very crusty; he had expected an answer to *one*, at least, of his letters of yesterday, and the postman had been, and he, Thomas Racquet, seemed to be the only individual in the house for whom there was no letter. Aunt Lucy had received her's from Coddlethorpe—the irascible young gentleman had received one from somewhere, for which there was the sum of one shilling and two-pence to pay, and he had nothing but a ten pound note to pay it with, which the postman declined to change, and made a great grumbling in doing so, and kept the street-door open so long, that Aunt Lucy very nearly went into fits; and there was one letter for Mrs. Martin, and two others for the servant; and Tom felt miserable, and solitary, and deserted, and vowed that as soon as he got better, he would look out for some little lonely rock in the middle of the sea, and go and take up his abode on the top of it all by himself, and cut the world and all the heartless creatures that crawled upon its surface, and live upon oysters and periwinkles, and sea-weed, and drink sea-water, and be happy all by himself.

The next day, however, a letter arrived; but what was Tom's consternation at receiving his own letter, addressed to Caroline, back again unopened, and enclosed in another from her father, politely declining all further correspondence, and peremptorily and firmly forbidding him again visiting Stamford Hill. Tom sat for some time stupified, and then forthwith set to work to get himself into a raging fever,—a feat which he accomplished thoroughly in a couple of days, when the doctor ordered him again to his bed, and moreover insisted, in very severe terms, that he should not leave it without his professional license first had and obtained: and so Tom buried his disconsolate nose deep in the pillow, and dreamed of a solitary rock

“ In some blue summer ocean far off and alone.”

CHAPTER IX.

SOMETHING MYSTERIOUS.

Now when old Mr. Whittlebury made up his mind to return the note which Tom had addressed to his daughter, he harboured not the slightest wish or intention of working that young gentleman any harm, especially in the present precarious state of his health. He merely intended to mark the displeasure with which he viewed some of Mr. Tom's rackets, and he also hoped gradually to bring him round to be a steady young fellow, by thus gently shewing him how much such proceedings militated against his wished-for union with Caroline; and the old gentleman had other reasons, scarcely as yet entirely developed even to himself, for not wishing to kill Mr. Thomas outright,—which reasons, we dare say, will gradually unfold themselves as our story proceeds. Therefore, although he secretly cancelled his vow of parting the young people, he determined upon appearing exceedingly distant and cold, and so to make them still believe that their eternal separation was a doom as unalterable as the laws of those very respectable and historically obstinate old people—the Medes and Persians. Acting upon this decision, he kept poor Caroline in total ignorance of Tom's rejected epistle.

Some very urgent and pressing business about this time, according to the old gentleman's account, required his presence in town at least three times a week; and having, upon the first opportunity, in accordance with his promise to himself, called, and explained, and apologized at greater length to Miss Lucy Racquet—not wishing of course to appear churlish to *her*,—he called occasionally afterwards to know how her patient was going on. Miss Lucy Racquet, however, now in possession of his name, received him but coldly; until, one morning, she took courage and mentioned her Nephew's affection for his daughter, and her unchangeable determination that the union should not take place; expecting that the old gentleman, after his pertinacity in cultivating her acquaintance, would be extremely cut up and angry at the decision.

To her great surprise, however, he not only joined her in considering it most expedient that the young folks should forget each other as fast as possible, but also nettled her a little by the information that he had himself some time before positively forbidden all further intercourse.

There are very many things in this life that we do to ourselves, which if any one else attempts to do for us, annoy us exceedingly: thus it was with Aunt Lucy. Her Nephew—the son of an officer and

a gentleman—refused! forbidden the house of a city merchant! She was glad of the termination of “this foolish affair,” as she called it, certainly; but did not like Mr. Whittlebury an iota the better for bringing the information, or being, however remotely or innocently, the root of all the mischief.

This explanation having been given and received, any one would have thought that there could be but little else of common interest between Mr. Erasmus Whittlebury and Aunt Lucy; still, to the lady’s great surprise, did the old gentleman continue his calls and inquiries. Every few days, rain, wind, or sunshine, and there was Mister Whittlebury—spruce as a humming-bird and lively as a lark. Aunt Lucy thought it odd at first, and felt half inclined to submit him to the painful operation of ‘snubbing.’ By degrees, however, that feeling wore away, and the old gentleman and Aunt Lucy would sit and chat very cosily together for half an hour or so every time he called, which, in truth, was now very often,—business, as he said, becoming more and more pressing, and requiring his presence in town every day.

The nature and extent of the said business remaining a secret to Miss Caroline Whittlebury, that young lady, true to her sex’s prerogative, no sooner discovered that it was a secret, than she set to work with all her little heart and soul to find it out; besides, she was very unhappy and low-spirited about Tom, and a little excitement was the very thing she wanted.

“I wish you would take me with you to-day, Pa’, dear,” said Carry, as she brushed the old gentleman’s hat, and affectionately handed it to him.

“Cannot, Carry—cannot,” replied her Papa. . “Should not know where to put you; very busy—girls always in the way.”

“I could take a walk to the West End, and then come and meet you at Farrance’s, Pa’, dear,” suggested Caroline.

“No, no! don’t tease, there’s a good girl; you shall go next time, perhaps,” said her Papa, turning himself round to the chimney-glass, and settling the natty tie of his white cravat into a more seemly form; and then, seizing his stick and giving an enquiring glance along his sable continuations and round the heels of his boots; feeling fully satisfied that neither spot nor blemish soiled their fair proportions, he gave his broad-brimmed hat the slightest possible shake out of the perpendicular, and sallied forth to London, leaving his rosy little daughter more full of curiosity than ever.

"I wonder what Papa can be doing," ruminated Caroline, as the door closed after him. "He never was accustomed to be so particular about his dress. I do declare he has become quite a beau since poor Tom's accident;" and then she walked musingly up stairs, thinking all the way about Tom, and how hard it was that she must part from him, and how foolish and wicked of him it was to get tipsy; not that she believed the tale—only she thought young men do not always find out that they have taken too much until too late, poor fellows! and then she thought how very easily a predilection for taking too much, even supposing that it did exist, could be controlled by a really loving and true-hearted wife, and how glorious must be the feelings attendant upon the successfully reclaiming and eventually averting the final downfall of one of God's most splendid creatures—a man of intellect and genius.

Alas! how many a true and genuine heart has thought so too, and broken when it found its error! How many an earnest and gentle soul has been driven to despair, and has sunk at last under the heart-rending misery of seeing the fell disease—for disease it must be, or men would surely avoid it,—increasing little by little, hour by hour, day by day, upon its victim, the beloved one of her bosom, stealing into his heart like a thief in the night, and robbing it of its once pure love for her, driving out all good and holy thoughts from their calm recesses, and leaving in their stead hot steaming ribaldry and profanation, and then as gradually and as certainly sapping the strong foundations of the mind, until even that is reduced to a reeling and tottering ruin, alike dangerous to itself and all about it! And how many more gentle and true and earnest hearts there are, with all this knowledge and sacrifice of others before their eyes, will still, and do daily dare the forlorn hope, and risk all they most value in the effort. The calm domestic scenes of happiness they have so long fondly and innocently anticipated for themselves, their good name, station, friends, father, and mother, are all cheerfully given up in the one dear hope of saving *him* from destruction, upon whom they have once and for ever fixed their lasting and priceless love; and kicks, blows, and brutal curses—nay, even murder, are but too often their only and wretched reward! None but the female heart *will* dare all this: man turns upon his fellow, and curses him as a drunkard and a fool—but pities him or attempts to reclaim him but seldom.

Caroline, from imagining how easy it would be to reclaim her darling Tom, supposing him guilty of this painful excess, commenced thinking

how very unkind it was of him not to have written once—not even a line—if it were only to say how his Aunts had received his proposition; and then the sudden idea occurred to her—“Poor fellow, how can he write with a broken arm.—I have a great mind to write to him myself,—I declare I have, if it be only to ask him about that odious tipsy business, and tell him how unkindly Papa and Mr. Horace Chuck have talked about it ever since.” No sooner thought than done;—a little three-cornered note was indited and sent; so mysteriously folded that no mortal postman was ever supposed to be able to divine the secret of getting at the interior, although the total absence of both wax and patent wafer might well have tempted many to the experiment.

It was about ten o'clock one fine morning that the postman knocked Aunt Lucy out of a musing fit by the parlour-window, and delivered this same little three-cornered note—and a very dangerous and suspicious little note it was too, judging by Aunt Lucy's scrutinizing glance over her spectacles; the address was in a very pretty little female hand, which made it none the more fit to be delivered in the present position of affairs,—and Aunt Lucy deliberated; at last, however, she trotted up stairs with the note, and threw it carelessly on the pillow, close to Tom's melancholy nose, and then commenced busying herself about the room in order to watch him while he read it. Tom seized the note with avidity, and, being wiser than the postman, soon found his way among the intricacies of the folding; and, after devouring the contents with flushing cheeks and sparkling eyes, swore he was much better, and meant to get up *instantly*, and that he would throw the physic to the dogs,—only that the dogs were too wise to have anything to say to it; and so Tom worked himself into excellent spirits, and sat up in bed, and quite crowed again with delight. Not so Aunt Lucy; she looked as grave as an abbess.

We do not consider it in our province to tell what were the contents of the little three-cornered note, and how they came to effect so sudden and salutary a change in the patient's condition. We live in a wholesome and lively bodily fear of the medical profession, which we have but little doubt would set upon us *en masse*, and denounce us, and the very first opportunity one of them might happen to have, drug us to the death, should we put the public at large into the possession of so valuable a specific: suffice it to say, the little note worked wonders; and although there might not have been hidden within its folds spells and incantations, deadly to hear and deadly to

tell, there was a something among them far more efficacious than the whole goodly range of empty phials which decorated the mantel-shelf of Tom's sick chamber.

Aunt Lucy guessed from whom the wonder-working little epistle had emanated, and put on her bonnet and proceeded for a walk, leaving Tom sitting up in his bed reading and re-reading its dear contents. Never was there physic which acted so well, and never was there patient who swallowed it so greedily.

"And so 'Papa has a great deal of business in the City just now,' has he," murmured Tom, as he read the note for the twentieth time, and commented upon it as he proceeded. "And the police affair she does not believe a word of—(bless her trusting little heart!)—and 'Papa is becoming quite a beau'—(going a courting, I suppose, stupid old fellow!)—and she'll die before she will forget me—(bless her little heart again!)—and 'Horace Chuck has been very disagreeable'—(I'll pull that fellow's nose for him, if he don't take care.) I'll have a run down to Stamford Hill, at any rate, that's poz; may I be shot if I don't, in less than a week; and I'll argue the case with the old gentleman, and tell him that oysters and ale always *do* disagree with me particularly, and convince him of the danger and cruelty of parting two such fond hearts as Carry's and mine own;" and Tom flung the little note half across the room in the energy of his declamation, and jumped out of bed after it with wonderful alacrity, and limped in again directly, finding himself still rather giddy and weak.

Tom had scarcely returned to his snug quarters, before a loud talking upon the landing-place announced visitors. Messrs. Rattleton and Phillpots, and two or three more of Tom's friends, who had never as yet been able to get past Aunt Lucy, now finding that she was out, took advantage of her absence; and, with much alacrity and some noise, stormed their sick friend's chamber. Malcontent and inconsolable had these faithful allies been at the illness of their comrade, but more especially at having been refused permission to visit him; their spirits were, therefore, proportionably high at the opportunity of getting so unexpectedly into his presence. All sorts of nostrums were immediately proposed for his speedy cure: each gentleman standing at the bed-side, with a gold-headed cane to his nose in true professional style, and all sorts of things warmly volunteered, even to the cashiering Aunt Lucy, and the promotion of one of themselves to her station as sick-nurse—all of which Tom, however, politely declined.

"What can we do for you then, old fellow?" said Mr. Bob Phill-

pots. "We are yours, you know—anything, from smothering the doctor downwards, except taking the physic."

"Or charging the *chevaux de frise*," said Master Charles Rattleton.

"What is the *chevaux de frise*?" said Tom.

"Why, your most illustrious Aunt," replied Bob; "she is the *chevaux de frise*. Never was there such a concentrated essence of pokers and whale-bone; she makes my back ache to look at her every time I call. Never could get beyond the drawing-room door: she used to stick herself at the top of the stairs like a bundle of spikes, and keep possession of the landing so well, that we could not help finding her some little affectionate by-name. I do not believe a troop of horse could get over her without receiving some damage. Let's feel your pulse, Tom."

Tom extended his wrist to the would-be doctor, smiled at his account, and asked after all his old chums, and received the news of the last rowing match,—in which the club had been most signally beaten for want of his presence,—with wonderful equanimity, so much so indeed as to surprise his friends.

"Why, Tom, you're as dull as the last new comedy this morning; it does not signify, the *chevaux de frise* must be removed, and a few light-hearted fellows admitted to your presence: you will get quite mouldy. By the by, Old Chuck has been making such a row about that little oyster business, that there is no bearing him. It seems that he saw us on that luckless morning, and has carried the news to your dearly beloved, and there has been the devil to pay about it."

"That accounts for it!—that accounts for it all!" said Tom, highly excited, his mind reverting immediately to the return of his note, addressed to Caroline, and to the contents of her father's, which accompanied it. "If I do not take a little of the saint out of that fellow when I get about again, I'll——"

Tom indented the pillow with a tremendous thump, and looked fiercely at his surrounding friends.

"Bravo!" shouted all the young gentlemen. "Do it again, Tom, nothing like a set-to; healthful exercise—if it's only with a pillow."

"We have come to tell you some news, Tom," said Bob, elevating his hand to stop the rising clamour.

"Well?" said Tom.

"Your friend, Chuck,——"

"He's no friend of mine," said Tom, turning very red.

"Well, Old Harry's Darning Needle, then——"

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TOM & HIS AMATEUR DOCTORS.

"Best Whitechapel sharps, warranted not to cut in the eye," interposed Mr. Rattleton.

"Got himself locked up last night," proceeded Mr. Phillpots.

"No!" said Tom, with a grin; "*Ebrius?*"

"Very!" said Bob, reciprocating Tom's smile.

"You don't say so. How was it? You must have had him in hand, you merciless rips," said Tom.

"Why, you see," said Bob, "Master Horace has been setting himself up for such an immaculate piece of flesh and blood, and spoiling so much sport, that we were determined to have our revenge upon him; so we got your four favourite tits and the drag, and drove him down to Blackwall, gave him a dinner at Lovegrove's, and damped him a little, just by way of finding out the soft parts."

"Never heard such a chap," chimed in Harry Rattleton; "he'd talk a horse's hind-leg straight."

"Well, he bragged and boasted in great style," continued Bob, "and at last came out with as pretty a little sentimental love-story as you would wish to hear made an old ballad of. Why, man, he's over head and ears in love with Miss Whittlebury, and up to his shirt-collars in revenge against you."

"Well, you must have varnished him uncommonly to get all that out of him," said Tom.

"Varnished him! Egad, if some of that old Burgundy won't bring the depths, as the painters say, out of a fellow's portrait, I do not know what will," said Bob Phillpots, with a short laugh.

Some most diabolical sounds here interrupted the conversation. Mr. Harry Rattleton having discovered Tom's favourite fiddle, commenced an extempore performance upon the same with great energy and effect. The performance was, however, quieted after a desperate struggle with his brother Charles, who eventually captured the fiddle.

"Well—go on," said Tom, when the clatter had subsided.

"We got back," broke in Harry Rattleton, advancing towards the bed-side, out of breath with the struggle—"We got back, took Horace to the Opera with us, supped afterwards at Verey's, wound up with some Roman punch, with a bottle of Champagne in it, and sallied forth in search of adventures—you know that old private watch-box at Sarsfield's, the bankers?"

"Yes," said Tom; "it runs in grooves up the wall, lets down at night, and is drawn up again in the morning."

"Well, we found the old Charley asleep; so we first of all pinned his rattle,—Horace standing by, looking as pale as a ghost,—then opened

the little half-door very softly, gave Horace a desperate push into the box, —two blows with a hammer, and a long nail provided for the purpose, and there they both were, Charley and Horace, as fast as two rats in a trap. Charley began to pound away at the intruder, and cry murder with all his might, and Horace to struggle and shout like a madman. But it was all no use; up they went, with a—‘Yo, heave Ho!’ and there we fixed them, sprung the rattle like blazes, and cut like bricks. Next morning, Horace was fined five shillings for being riotous and disorderly.”

“Too bad! too bad!” said Tom, trying to be heard above the merri-ment which followed the close of the story. “You should have carried him off with you, at any rate.”

“Devil a bit,” said Bob. “He was not worth saving; for a more selfish, bragging pump of a fellow I never met with yet.”

“We have not done with him yet,” said Harry.

“Why, what are you going to do with him next?” inquired Tom.

“Rob him!” said Bob Phillpots, almost shouting.

Again the fun grew fast and furious, and got the better of the silence proper for a sick-room; indeed, the gentlemen seemed totally to have forgotten all about Tom’s indisposition. Harry Rattleton resumed his heart-rending performances upon the fiddle; Bob Phillpots began singing—

“Silence, or you meet your fate—
Your keys, your jewels, cash and plate,”

in loud and sonorous tones; while the rest stood laughing, and hand-ling the empty phials, and playing all sorts of antics. Never was there such a noise in a sick gentleman’s bed-chamber before.

A smart knock at the street-door, suddenly interrupted Mr. Bob Phillpots at “rifle, rob, and plun——” and an immediate silence, as if by general consent, pervaded the chamber.

“That is my Aunt’s knock,” said Tom, highly amused at the anxious and listening attitudes of his boisterous friends.

“We must be off, Tom,” said the whole party in a breath. “Never do to be found up here; we must be off like steam—the *chevaux de frise* will impale us upon the spot. Good-bye, old fellow; look sharp, Bob, here she comes.”

And all the party leaned over the bed, and held out their hands to Tom to be shaken at once.

Before, however, they could make their escape, Aunt Lucy entered the room; and greatly surprised she seemed to be at the company assembled. Tom introduced them severally, and Aunt Lucy treated them each to

a very chilly acknowledgment, and reminded them of the doctor's most positive orders, that their friend should be kept perfectly quiet.

Harry Rattleton immediately hid the fiddle, and protested he was the quietest fellow in the world, as did all the rest of the party. Aunt Lucy smiled, and gracefully bowed them down stairs; and then treated Tom to a lengthened dissertation upon the rudeness and audacity of his acquaintances in venturing into his chamber, in spite of her repeated orders to the contrary. She then sat down and removed her bonnet, protesting that she had never been so tired in her life.

Aunt Lucy had been to Covent Garden Market, and purchased some fruit; to the fishmonger's, and purchased some fish; and had sorely offended both the tradesmen by offering them much less than the value of the articles—for Aunt Lucy was a saving and careful body, and was very much imbued with the idea that all London tradesmen are most abominable rogues, and always ask twice as much for an article as it is intrinsically worth; and she had, moreover, insisted upon her purchases being sent home with her, in order to prevent the possibility of their being changed for others of inferior value. She, therefore, made her appearance in Jermyn Street, attended by a very elegant specimen of a 'Biddy—the basket-woman,' and a grinning fishmonger's boy. The 'monkey of a boy' had wickedly amused himself all the way, to the good lady's extreme anxiety and annoyance, by walking on so briskly in front, that she very often more than half-suspected he was going to make off with the fish, and trotted on with all her might in consequence to keep up with him; so that between watching the young piscator in advance, and beckoning to the ancient Pomona who was loitering in the rear, poor Aunt Lucy, when she arrived at her own door, was very much out of breath, and heartily tired of her marketing, and said that she always suspected the London people were cheats, but now she was quite certain of it, and protested that she would not live among them if they would give her the world. However, when dinner-time came, as both the fish and the fruit proved excellent, she relented a little, and acknowledged that after all London *was* the place to get things good, if you could but find honest folks to deal with, and blessed the discrimination which had led her to the two respectable houses for her morning's purchases.

Tom of course came in for the whole history of the bargains, from her first having been smitten with the articles as they lay temptingly displayed upon their respective boards up to the time of their arrival at the door, together with the animated discussion between Biddy the

basket-woman and herself, touching a seemingly overcharged sixpence upon the part of that feminine functionary, and which terminated, as all such battles invariably do, in favour of the most ragged of the disputants: and then Aunt Lucy had had another very aggravating adventure. Not having been in London since Mr. Shillibeer had conferred his omnibus favours upon its inhabitants, she had only become acquainted with the customs of these vehicles by hearsay, and had some idea that they were bound to take passengers when and where the said passengers pleased, after the fashion of hackney coaches. Taking it into her head, therefore, to purchase her fish at Hungerford Market, she put herself into a 'Buss' in Oxford Street, stating most particularly where she was to be set down, without knowing exactly the direction of the Market, and waited very patiently until the conductor should inform her of the termination of the journey, which he did by turning her out at Mile End, and insisting upon being paid an extra sixpence for the whole distance, and not answering her very politely either when she remonstrated with him upon his impropriety in running away with a lady in so scandalous a manner. The driver had also indulged in a race with a rival vehicle, and had smashed in the panels of a gentleman's carriage, and upset a cab in the City, and had got into a very noisy and desperate quarrel with the by-standers on that account, most especially with one gentleman, who wanted to take his number, but who could not take his number notwithstanding, without first of all fighting him for it, which the gentleman declined to do, and wished to hand the case over to the police,—but, as the police were not present until all the row and turmoil had nearly subsided, they declined interfering with the matter, telling the gentleman he had better apply to a magistrate; which was doubtless very good advice; but as the gentleman was obliged to leave town for Hamburg the following morning, it was not, upon the whole, perhaps, a very efficient method of proceeding.

Tom condoled with his Aunt upon all her mishaps, and promised soon to initiate her into some of the most approved methods of dealing with London tradesmen, and managing locomotion with better comfort to herself, and equal profit to the proprietors, and delighted her much by his improved state of health and spirits.

Another week passed, during which Mr. Erasmus Whittlebury regularly called to enquire after Tom's health, without his having been made acquainted with the circumstance.

Now, it may seem very strange all this time, (nearly a month having

elapsed,) that Aunt Lucy should not once have alluded to the fact of Mr. Whittlebury's calling, or even mentioned his name. One, and her principal reason, no doubt, for not touching upon this delicate subject, was her extreme anxiety to avoid every thing which might bring Caroline to her dear Nephew's memory, knowing the excitable nature of his feelings, and the mortal certainty of being submitted to the flame of his argumentative eloquence if that young lady's name were once introduced. The other reason Aunt Lucy somehow did not exactly know herself, except perhaps that she had a dislike to mention the name of Whittlebury; however, she was highly delighted at finding her patient so much better, and very sagely prophesied his entire recovery in another fortnight, provided he would not be obstinate, and would be entirely guided by her, and remain in bed a little while longer; to which Tom responded this time, for a wonder, without any display of his rhetoric, by turning very unexpectedly out of bed the next morning, and dressing himself with the assistance of Mr. Jones, the barber,—(hair-dresser, we mean,)—to whose tonsorian manipulations he had as usual been submitting himself.

"Any news, Jones?" said Tom, as he finished his toilet and gave his newly-mown chin a comforting stroke with his left hand. Mr. Jones, who was a reflective and considering young gentleman, replied with his usual ruminative call upon his memory. "Let's see, sir. No, sir—none particular, sir: only they say that there is a new bass singer coming over—with such a fine powerful voice; he's an American, I believe, sir; they say that he split the two top bars of a fire-grate the other day, when he happened to sing out rather louder than usual;—but then them Yankees *do* tell such lies."

"Why, they are rather given to poetic license now and then, Jones."

"Let's see, sir. Yes, sir. Poetic license, sir——"

"Any one with my Aunt, when you came up, Jones?"

"Let's see, sir. Yes, sir. Smart elderly gentleman, sir. Mr. —— don't know his name, sir; good-looking gentleman, sir."

"Dear me!" said Tom, "I wonder who it can be;" and he arched up his eyebrows in some slight surprise.

"Let's see, sir," replied Mr. Jones—"don't know, sir; but he's often here about this time in the morning when I call, sir."

"Hallo!" said Tom, elevating his eyebrows still more, "what's all this?"

"Let's see, sir," continued the loquacious Mr. Jones; "can't possibly say, sir."

"The gentleman is here now, I think you said, Jones?"

"Let's see—yes, sir; that is, he was here when I came up half an hour go, sir."

"I'll go down and join them instantly. I dare say I know who it is. I shall see you again to-morrow, Jones."

"Let's see—yes, sir," replied Mr. Jones. "Good morning, sir;" and down stairs skipped he of the razor and strop, with the lively step of his profession, leaving Mr. Thomas Racquet to settle his wounded arm a little more comfortably into its black silk sling, and speculate upon the identity of his Aunt's regular visitor.

"Now I'll go down and surprise my dear Aunt," said Master Tom, as he prepared to descend. "I feel a little unscrewed or so, but wonderfully better. I'll be at Stamford Hill in a week now;" and slowly and surely Tom commenced his journey down the corkscrew staircase leading to his sitting-room.

Over the door of Tom's sitting-room was fixed a large round piece of glass, having the appearance, from the inside of the room, of a handsome mirror set in a smart gold frame, with little gilt knobs all round it; while in fact it was nothing more than a window or borrowed light, as it is technically termed, thus ingeniously contrived to lessen the darkness at the foot of the staircase. When Tom, in his careful descent, had arrived upon a level with this little window, his feelings were so strongly worked upon by something he saw in the room,—doubtless his dear Aunt sitting in all the pride of domestic happiness, and doing the honours of the house to her elderly visitor,—that he was completely overcome, and stood stock still.

We have known Nephews who have loved their Aunts very fondly—very fondly indeed, and who have parted with them at nine o'clock in the morning and seen them again at eleven—though perhaps not through a round pane of glass, and yet have so far succeeded in mastering the exuberance of their joy, that a casual observer would have been led to imagine that there was no very extraordinary love burning in their bosoms, and that the circumstance of again meeting with their beloved relations, after two or three hours' separation, was a matter in which but slight feeling was called into play. Not so however with Tom: he had parted affectionately with his Aunt at nine o'clock in the morning, and was upon the point of again beholding her; nay, he *did* see her even then, and the sight was evidently too much for him—or not enough for him, we are not quite certain which, for he stood upon the stairs with neck outstretched and eye

dilated, lips slightly parted, and his whole demeanour evincing a degree of affection totally unparalleled. We are also credibly informed that the interjection "Ha!" escaped from his tongue, but in scarcely an audible whisper; it was very evident, however, that Tom was deeply affected by whatever it was he did see in the sitting-room; for he stood in the same attitude, and upon the same spot, for some minutes, gazing intently through the window, and opening his fine large dark eyes to their utmost, and breathing shortly, as if he were afraid the delicious picture before him would vanish before he had half satisfied his love with gazing upon it.

At least, we suppose all this must have been the result of Tom's most fervent and fiery love for his Aunt; but never having seen a gentleman under the circumstances just related, we are not enabled to bring our usual test of experience to bear upon the matter, and thereby settle the point beyond dispute: one thing, however, we *may* venture upon,—if any thing is to be deduced from any thing,—that Tom's excitement at last became so ungovernable, and his evident wish to fly into the room and take his dear Aunt round the neck so intense, that he suddenly desisted from staring in at the little window, and with a self-possession and command highly praiseworthy resisted the temptation; and fearing, lest he should not be able to hold out if he remained where he was, fairly turned tail and bolted up stairs to his room again; when he had safely arrived therein, he committed an unprovoked assault upon his left leg with his left hand, and ejaculated "Capital!"—doubtless in reference to the marvellous celerity and strength of mind with which he had accomplished his retreat.

Tom instantly indited two epistles, one large and the other small, and smiled all the time, as if letter-writing were the most exhilarating pastime on the face of the earth, instead of being, as everybody knows, more or less a very great bore: the larger epistle, which was addressed to his Aunts at Coddlethorpe, he placed in his pocket-book, ready for an opportunity of sending it per post, and the lesser one, addressed to Miss Caroline Whittlebury, he sent off out of hand, and by express, seducing a juvenile butcher, who was delivering a pound-and-a-half of beefsteaks at the door, from his allegiance, and bribing him with the sum of Sixpence to undertake its delivery into the hands of either the young lady herself or old Bob the gardener,—a business which the juvenile butcher very readily undertook and promised most faithfully to perform.

CHAPTER X.

THE KISS AND THE CONSEQUENCE.

TOM had scarcely dispatched his epistle, ere the sound of retreating footsteps announced that a visiter was descending, on his way out, and Aunt Lucy at the same time tripped into Tom's room. There was a quiet gentle blush lingering upon her usually pale cheek, that almost outshone the delicate little pink flower which had, on this last day or two, most unaccountably found its way amongst the borders of her cap; but the smile instantly fled, and the blush immediately increased to an alarming extent, when she beheld Master Tom up and dressed, and walking about his chamber.

"Why, Tom, my dear boy! how very imprudent of you to get up so soon," commenced his Aunt, with some little agitation in her voice and manner.

"Not at all, Aunt!" replied Tom, in a somewhat loud and jocular tone for a sick man. "Not at all! Why I am getting quite strong, and most abominably tired of my room, in spite of my gentle nurse. Why, bless you, Aunt, I mean to go out for a walk to-morrow. I came down stairs just now, as far as the sitting-room door"—(Here Aunt Lucy gave a very palpable start, and popt her head and shoulders forthwith into the clothes-press)—Tom paused, and smiled rather wickedly, and then resumed,—“I came down stairs, as far as the sitting-room door, but hearing that you were engaged with some old woman or other, I trotted off again.”

Aunt Lucy coloured up in the clothes-press so completely that the little pink flower in her cap must have suffered a total eclipse, and commenced a very diligent search for some phantom article of wearing apparel. Now why should Aunt Lucy have blushed so deeply, and begun to search so industriously for that which she well knew was not to be found? Was it because she had hidden something from her darling Tom with which it was not proper for him, in his present state of health, to be acquainted?—or was it really after all some daring and desperate old woman, disguised in a broad-brimmed hat and black coat, and ditto continuations, and bent upon some momentous errand, the secret whereof was only confided to her gentle ear, who was with her?—or was it the provoking air of intelligence which seemed all of a sudden to have illuminated her dear Nephew's physiognomy, which unnerved her so much, and caused all this trepidation?—or was it—but it matters but little what it was :

there *was* however something, and Aunt Lucy felt particularly uncomfortable, and affectionately wished her dear Nephew at "Jericho." She did not however avail herself of the excuse thus ingeniously thrown out by Tom—of 'the old woman,' for that would be equivocation, and to *that* she would not stoop. She must have had some very secret and silent reason now, for not letting Tom know of Mr. Erasmus Whittlebury's daily affectionate inquiries after him: but whatever it might have been, she was evidently in a dilemma: so she attempted to compromise the matter with her conscience, and said, "Well?" and "Ah!" and "Yes!" in answer to Tom's remarks. Her conscience however considered that she was equivocating, when she thus spake, and would not be compromised with and cheated in any such way,—so waited until she had taken her head out of the clothes-press, and then sent its tell-tale blushes up into her face faster and redder than ever.

Tom marked his advantage, and most wickedly and delightedly enjoyed it; and in order somewhat to allay his dear Aunt's confusion, suddenly exclaimed, that he felt it very unkind of the Whittleburys not to have asked after him—even once—during the whole time of his illness.

"Oh! a gentleman of the name of Whittlebury has called several times," said Aunt Lucy, "and I told him you were getting on very well:" and she turned her head once more into the clothes-press, for she thought Tom was looking at her—but he was not; he steadily persisted in looking another way, lest by any sudden burst of merriment he should spoil his sport.

"The gentleman called last Monday," continued Aunt Lucy from the clothes-press, feeling it necessary, for some undefined reason, to continue the subject, as Tom remained silent; but she did not say that 'the gentleman' had been there that very morning.

It is very astonishing the deal of trouble that ensues after some slight deviation from the straight path of veracity, and how much more inclined we are to persist in the disagreeable track, mending and botching as we go, rather than turn boldly round and confess ourselves in the wrong. Here was Aunt Lucy in a quandary, all in a trepidation and a fuss, and all over blushes, and with her head in a clothes-press,—and all because she had yielded to the temptation of silently denying Mr. Whittlebury's visits to her Nephew. Poor Aunt Lucy! how particularly warm she felt, and uncomfortable at the result of her prevarication.

"Well, Aunt, and how do you like Mr. Whittlebury? Nice old fellow,—is he not?" said Tom, after a slight pause in the conversation, and a great rustling in the clothes-press.

"I do not think him old, Thomas, by any means," replied Aunt Lucy.

"Not old! Aunty—why he's eight-and-forty, at the least! But he's a famous favourite with the ladies nevertheless. Now what fun it would be—and I should not at all wonder at it—if he were to take a fancy to you. How pleasant it would——"

"Do not talk nonsense, Tom," interrupted Aunt Lucy, making another desperate attempt to bury herself alive in the clothes-press.

"Yes, but,—don't you see," persisted Master Tom, "if you were to marry Mr. W., and I were to marry my dear Caroline, you would have the felicity of being my Mother-in-law as well as my Aunt?"

Aunt Lucy pounced upon this sentence like a hawk in full flight, withdrew herself from the press instantly, faced about, and right fearlessly and gladly turned the tables upon her tormenting Nephew,—by begging him, with infinite gravity and impressiveness, never to mention that young lady's name again in conjunction with his own, as both herself and her sisters had determined, after very mature consideration, that any connexion with the family of the Whittleburys was totally and for ever out of the question, and not to be entertained for a single moment.

"No—but Aunt Lucy——" began Tom, in his usual argumentative style.

"Yes!—but Mr. Thomas," exclaimed his Aunt, "once again I tell you we will not hear of it; and so let that suffice. I declare I am getting quite angry with you."

Tom commenced walking up and down his room, very much disturbed by this sudden onslaught of the besieged, raising his hand every now and then in a deprecatory manner, as his Aunt ran on with her somewhat voluble attack upon the object of his affections. She continued in the same strain for some minutes with untiring perseverance, despite all Tom's imploring looks, stopping him every time he evinced any symptom of answering, and finally closed the subject by a victorious retreat, after having not only raised the siege but beaten the assailant to boot.

Tom looked after her, as she vanished, shrugged up his shoulders, and confessed to himself that his dear Aunt had fairly silenced him. "What a blushing countenance she had though, when she with-

drew her head. How she must have wished me at her favourite 'Jerieho,' said Tom. Here he was taken with a most violent and undutiful paroxysm of winking and laughing. "It will be a match though,—that's decided. I saw Old Whittlebury kiss her hand; and she did *not* box his ears: uncommonly conscious she was too—and very sly into the bargain. Oh, Aunt—Aunt! this *will* be news for Coddlethorpe."

Tom, as soon as he had recovered the command of his countenance, descended, and found his Aunt sitting in the parlour. That lady had also recovered the command of *her* countenance, and they sat very comfortably together, one on each side the table. Aunt Lucy was in the act of congratulating her Nephew upon his first appearance down stairs, after so long an absence, when a knock at the door caused her suddenly to stop.

"What's the matter?" said Tom.

"Nothing," said Aunt Lucy, still listening and half rising from her chair.

"I should not at all wonder," said Tom, "if that were Mr. Whittlebury returned for his glove—that one on the corner of the table there."

"Glove—bless me! Oh! Yes. You can give it him, Tom, while I run up stairs for a minute."

"Why, Aunt, I thought you said he was here *last* Monday," said Tom, grinning like a monkey; "and there it has been lying ever since, I suppose."

Aunt Lucy did not wait the conclusion of Tom's speech, but commenced a precipitate retreat towards the door, just as the party had been admitted from without: and it so happened that it *was* Mr. Whittlebury, and also that he had returned for his glove. How it came that he had never missed it until he had reached Charing Cross, is a circumstance unaccounted for; and it also happened that the old gentleman having become familiarized with the ways of the house,—as a man will do after having been in the habit of squeezing the door handles for a month or so,—walked straight up to the door of the sitting room, and laid hands upon the bright brass knob thereof, just as Aunt Lucy did the same upon the opposite side.

Now Aunt Lucy was evidently in a twitter, and for a moment seemed to have forgotten whether the door opened inwards or outwards,—a state of confusion not likely to be much improved by

another person having stout hold of the handle and turning it in one direction every time she essayed to turn in the opposite.

"Tiresome door!" said Aunt Lucy, from the inside.

"Drat the door!" said old Mr. Whittlebury, from the outside, quite as much troubled to account for the difficulty as the lady.

At last, both suddenly waxing impatient and hot, and equally labouring under the idea that the door had taken unto itself a fit of 'sticking,'—a complaint occasionally afflicting the doors of lodging-houses,—gave it a hearty and desperate impetus, both in the same direction and at the self-same moment.

Open flew the door! Out flew Aunt Lucy! In flew Mr. Erasmus Whittlebury,—or rather he would have done so, had it not happened that he received the lady in his arms!

The old gentleman, in the hurry of his entry and in the flurry of the moment, did not see Tom; and to that accident, together with the circumstance of there still lingering in his heart the remains of some few early habits of gallantry, and also to the surprise of so unexpectedly finding an agreeable lady in his arms, must be ascribed the fact that he did, designedly and knowingly, and with his full senses about him, actually kiss Mr. Thomas Racquet's maiden Aunt, *twice*, before she could disengage herself, and that too under the very eyes of Mr. Thomas Racquet himself.

Now to kiss a maiden Aunt at all, is a feat requiring some courage and presence of mind; but to kiss one in the presence of a wag of a Nephew, requires a degree of coolness and consideration almost unparalleled, as any gentleman will find who may happen to try the experiment: however, it is no use talking, old Mr. Whittlebury kissed Aunt Lucy, and that is all about it; and Tom both saw him and heard him do it into the bargain.

"A palpable kiss, by Jove!" said Tom, as the double report reached his ear; "and came properly off with a sweet and a melodious twang. The kiss, which is said to have startled the woods of Madeira, was nothing to it!" Aunt Lucy vanished; and old Mr. Whittlebury started and turned round scowling and angry, and met the smiling and delighted physiognomy of Mr. Thomas Racquet, who rose from his chair, and very politely handed him a seat.

An old gentleman, when suddenly caught in the act of kissing a young gentleman's Aunt—judging from Mr. Whittlebury's appearance just at this moment—must feel himself in rather an embarrassing



MR. WHITFLEURY & AUNT LUCY.

predicament, the more especially as young gentlemen are in a slight degree given to quizzing their seniors, under these circumstances, instead of respectfully standing by and profiting by their example. Aunts, likewise, we opine, if they be doomed to be kissed at all, would almost prefer submitting to the operation rather without the presence of their Nephews than with it; maiden aunts and old gentlemen both holding such nonsensical ceremonies in such absolute and supreme contempt, that nothing short of the direst necessity can possibly induce them to submit to so pernicious a custom, even when by themselves; but to be caught in the voluntary perpetration of such an enormity—oh ye powers!—but it *is* aggravating in the last degree! By our conscience, but it causes the young ones to grumble and swear not a little!—at least the masculine moiety of the pair; but the elderlies—if they *could* cram the Thames Tunnel with gunpowder, and insert the unfortunate intruder into one end of it, would they not fire the other, and forthwith blow him away for ever, without the slightest compunction or hesitation! Of a verity, they would; and be right glad of the opportunity into the bargain. Whether this greater degree of irascibility, evinced by the elders, arises from the fact of their not being sufficiently in practice to stand the scrutinizing eye of their juniors, or whether it be that they are in possession of some patent method of performing the ceremony, the which they do not wish infringing, is a matter which will remain, we dare say, some little time longer in obscurity.

Mr. Whittlebury looked lemons at Mr. Thomas Racquet, as he seated himself in the proffered chair, and extended his cane across his knees with both hands.

Mr. Thomas Racquet seated himself also, carelessly throwing one leg over the other; and at once perceiving that the old gentleman felt himself, as the phrase goes, 'set fast,' determined to indulge him with the full benefit of his confusion, by leaving him to commence the conversation—if conversation there were to be—by himself. Old Mr. Whittlebury, however, seemed in no hurry to address his smiling host; so both sat silent for some few moments—the one from pure wickedness, and the other from sheer inability to proceed; and, moreover, half choking with anger and surprise.

Cupid, or Hymen—or somebody else, whoever it may happen to be under whose superintendence the love-making and kissing department of the elderly folk is placed,—no doubt took umbrage at the fun the young gentleman felt inclined to make of the little sacrifice just

offered at his shrine, and feeling himself as it were sure of the worship of Mr. Thomas whether or no, and, moreover, considering himself in some measure injured by the irreverence with which his long-tried endeavours upon the more sedate, and, consequently, more difficult heart of Mr. Whittlebury, were treated, and that, too, just in the very moment of his glorious victory,—determined to punish Mr. Thomas Racquet for this malicious enjoyment of his antique votary's confusion, and so at once suspended the elderly gentleman's powers of utterance, and at the same time pumped all the slight stock of patience out of the bosom of the younger, and then immediately tempted him to commence the conversation, by inducing him to inquire after the health of Miss Caroline, the dearly beloved mistress of his heart and affections.

"I hope your daughter is well, sir," said Mr. Thomas Racquet.

"My daughter is *not* well, sir," said Mr. Whittlebury, in reply, grasping his stick very hard, and glaring most awfully at his interrogator. "My daughter is *not* well, sir; and has not been well for some time past, sir. She has been insulted and trifled with—and deceived, and made a fool of by a young fellow, sir, of idle and dissipated habits; and it seems to have cost her some pain and exertion to have forgotten him, sir—and discarded him, sir; and she is almost ashamed of herself for having for a moment been deluded into the belief that a swaggering night-brawler could be in the slightest degree worth her notice, sir!"

Now Tom had not at all looked for such a choleric display on the part of the old gentleman, and was **proportionably** taken aback by the same. He had calculated, as he did upon his well remembered visit to Coddlethorpe, on having the best of the laugh to himself; the fun, therefore, which he had expected to extract from the accident of the kiss, melted into air, and the radiance of his countenance gradually disappeared as this thunder-clap roared about his ears; and, in one short moment, he felt himself reduced to the exact state into which he had intended to subdue the old gentleman,—namely, a state of ridiculous perplexity: in short, Tom had caught a Tartar, and did not like the feel of him in the least, and looked very blank in consequence.

The old gentleman was incensed beyond measure at the young one's audacity and impudence, in having been present at the moment of his kissing the lady, and waxed hotter and hotter in temper, and redder and redder in the face as he thought of it, until at last, to use Tom's expression, he 'peppered away,' both at him and everything in the

room, in such a style that mortal patience could scarcely endure the infliction. The pictures of the two young ladies in the semi-transparent draperies, were stigmatized by no very complimentary epithets, and their luckless owner asked what modest and decent young woman could abide such atrocities; the boxing gloves were called mere emblems of blackguardism and brutality; the foils, the gun, the long-bow, the bat, but so many symptoms of idleness and dissipation; the books, the magazines, the flute—everything came in for its share of the storm, until a stray play-bill or two turned the current to the theatre, and thence by an easy digression to the ale and the oysters, and, finally, to Mr. Tom Smith and the police-office; at which climax the hurricane broke with such terrific fury, that poor Tom was completely non-plussed. This last was a subject upon which the old gentleman had long promised his young friend a sound dressing, and which, at the present moment, seemed to come most fortuitously to his aid, just, in fact, as he was wondering how he should keep up the storm until he had recovered his glove, and made his exit, without giving Tom time to reply, or make any remarks concerning the little passage of gallantry just performed. In this, as will be perceived,—he fully succeeded; for Tom, awed by the severity of his manner, and a little weak withal from his long confinement, readily bent to the blast, and but just found breath enough, before the door slammed after old Mr. Whittlebury, to say something about “kissing my Aunt;” the which words must have been sadly squeezed in getting out of the door in time to reach the old gentleman’s ears, or else must have got through the key-hole. Reach his ears, however, they did, and right smartly they must have tickled them too; for the old gentleman’s manner of progression up the street partook more of the character of a run, than that steady and stately march proper for individuals of his years and solidity.

While all this thunder was being performed below, Aunt Lucy was performing the rain above; and the unfortunate Tom went up stairs, after following Mr. Whittlebury into the passage, just in time to be caught in the deluge of the first shower.

“Oh, Tom! leave me—leave me!” said Aunt Lucy, crying as Tom entered.

“My dear Aunt, I feel as highly incensed as yourself at his kissing you,” said Tom severely.

“He did not kiss me, sir,” said his Aunt, sobbing very much. “It was extremely rude of him, nevertheless, to try.”

"Well, never mind—what if he did? You know, Aunt, you are still very handsome; besides——"

"Hold your tongue, Tom, and go down stairs, do!" said his Aunt, with a stamp of the foot. "You are as impertinent as that stupid old man."

"Old man, Aunt! Why you said a little while since that you did not consider him old."

Aunt Lucy instantly boxed Tom's ears with a very smart box, and pushed him out of the room, totally regardless of his corporal safety, inasmuch as the top of the stairs came very nearly up to the room-door; and, when he was gone, sat down and finished the capital and very comforting cry which his entry had in some measure interrupted.

Full of grief and vexation, she divided the onus of the misfortune between her own unlucky stars, Tom's sudden recovery, and Old Mr. Whittlebury's clumsiness—all of which she sent, as was her custom, to 'Jericho,' with unhesitating good will. She vowed that she would pack up instantly, and set off back again to Coddlethorpe with all possible dispatch, and there remain for ever excluded from the profane gaze of man. "To think," exclaimed the poor lady in the height of her anger, and stamping almost furiously enough to have crushed a daisy;—"to think that—that Tom should have been—I declare I am—it was so foolish of him not to see there was somebody in the room! What will Cecily and Emily say to it if it once gets to their ears? And that tiresome Tom will be sure to have some nonsensical song or other about it: I know he will—he's wicked enough for anything!" and Aunt Lucy walked up and down the room with her handkerchief to her eyes in piteous perturbation.

Now we mean to be generous, and let our readers into a little bit of a secret, more than half suspecting that if we do not, they will find it out of themselves. The fact was, that Old Mr. Whittlebury had more than half fallen in love with Aunt Lucy, and had for some days more than half made up his mind to announce the interesting circumstance to that lady; and, what is still more, had most decidedly on that very morning, during a fit of more than usual admiration, actually more than half 'popped the question,' and that, too, in so sudden and ardent a manner, that his fair charmer was not a little alarmed, not so much for her own fate, as for the reception such a piece of news would be likely to meet with at the hands of her sisters,—all three having made up their minds long ago, and agreed among themselves, to remain single for ever.

"What *shall* I do?—what *shall* I do?" soliloquized poor Aunt Lucy. "I am sure I dare not tell Emily and Cecily—in fact, I cannot; and that Tom, too! Whip the men! to think I should be taking a fancy to any one at my time of life! Heigho! not so old either—and that little chit of a girl will be wanting to marry Tom, immediately. How tiresome it is—how excessively provoking! I did not exactly accept him though, that's one great comfort; but how I am ever to get over it all, I am sure I do not know; one thing, however, I am determined upon—I return to the Hall to-morrow; Master Tom is now evidently quite well enough to take care of himself;" and so Aunt Lucy set to work with right good-will to get ready for her departure.

"Here's a pretty mess!" said Master Tom when his Aunt had expelled him from the room, and he began to review the circumstances. "I have totally spoiled the cooing of these two antique turtles; that's very plain. I really believe Old Dad, that is to be—for I *will* have Caroline—will never forgive me for so indiscreetly assisting at his tender interview; and as to poor Aunty, she looks as if she could eat me alive! It will be a fine piece of fun, though, if it be managed properly. Oh! Aunty—Aunty, you understand matters as well as the younger ones after all! First catch a gentleman to your mind, then apply a little gentle warmth, either of eyes or smiles—or both, and he will soon sublimate and become a lover; continue the warmth at a little higher temperature, until, like a roasting chestnut, he 'pops,' then is the time for a little delicate management—be ready, and the moment the pop takes place—(shewing that he is done enough)—have the retort ready, and condense him at once—he will then become a husband. Oh! Aunty—Aunty, I am glad you are caught, or have caught somebody else, which is the same thing. You will have some little mercy now upon poor Carry, and your very affectionate Nephew Thomas; and, besides, it serves you right, for all your by-gone cruelty to those two extremely interesting individuals."

"Where are you going to, Anne?" shouted Tom, as the maid-servant passed the open door with her bonnet on.

"Going to book a place for to-morrow morning in the Bedford 'Regulator,' sir. Miss Racquet is packing up her boxes now," replied the maiden; "she's going home again."

"Bless us!" said Tom to himself, "what a hurry she is in."

CHAPTER XI.

A MYSTERIOUS VISITER.

WHEN Anne returned from booking the place, she found a tall shabby-looking fellow, in a white hat, at the street-door, scraping a pair of half-boots at the scraper, and holding on by the knocker with one hand, and the pine-apple top of the area railings with the other, as if the operation were too much for him without some support.

The stranger, upon perceiving Anne make a full stop opposite him, with the latch-key dangling from her finger, suddenly desisted from his scraping, and honoured her with a bewitching and condescending smile. Anne took no notice of the shabby gentleman's blandishments, but pushed hastily past him, applied her latch-key, opened the door, popped the little basket with the cabbages in it down just inside the passage, and then, secure upon her own territories, boldly faced about, and demanded the gentleman's business.

"Who did you please to want, sir?" said Anne, with the solemnity of a judge.

"Mr. Racquet," said the stranger, with another of his smiles.

Anne pointed with her thumb, and was just upon the point of informing the stranger that the half-open door, upon his right hand, led to the sitting-room in which that gentleman then was, when Tom, hearing his name pronounced, came forward; before, however, he had crossed the room, the stranger had entered, in obedience to the directing thumb of Anne, and closed the door behind him.

"Your name's Racquet, sir," said the gentleman, seating himself unbidden, taking off his white hat, and rubbing up a very sandy head of hair into a regular brutus.

"Thank you, sir," said Tom, "so it is;" and Tom stared at his visitor, uncertain whether to be offended at his coolness or amused at his impudence.

"I've met you somewhere, sir," said the stranger.

"Very likely, sir—I often go there," said Tom, trying to make something out of him.

The stranger was silent; the smile vanished, and a frown rolled out of the sandy brutus, and covered his forehead.

"I have not the pleasure of your name, I think, sir," said Tom.

"Possibly not, sir," said the stranger. "My name is Blink."

"I have not the pleasure of knowing upon what business you have

called, sir," continued Tom, in the same tone, and imitating the off-hand manner of his visiter in some degree.

"Possibly not, sir," said the stranger. "My business with you, sir, will be something to your advantage."

"The sooner I am in possession of it, the better then, sir," said Tom.

"Possibly so, sir," continued the stranger. "I am a man of business, sir."

"Do not waste any more time then, sir," said Tom. "Proceed."

The stranger evidently did not like to be taken up quite so short, and looked very sourly upon Tom, and seemed to hesitate a little.

"Pray proceed, sir," said Tom, very coolly; for the sour looks of his visiter acidulated his own temper in some slight degree. The stranger suddenly resumed, with a question which made Tom jump.

"You had a father, sir——?"

"The hereditary fashion of the family, I believe, sir," said Tom grimly, recovering himself.

"He is dead, sir?" said the stranger.

"He is, sir," said Tom, beginning to wonder what was to come next.

"You had a mother, sir?"

"Well, sir?" said Tom, slightly losing his temper.

"She died too, I believe?" continued the gentleman, as coolly as possible.

"May I ask, sir," said Tom, "what all this interrogatory is to lead to?"

"Something to your advantage, sir," briefly responded the stranger.

"She died too, I believe, sir?"

"She did, sir," said Tom.

"Your parents left no children but yourself, sir, I believe?" said the stranger.

"Right, sir," said Tom, "none."

"They died in India, I believe, sir?" said the stranger.

"They did, sir."

"You have three Aunts, living at Coddlethorpe, I believe, sir?"

"I have, sir," said Tom.

"They are in possession of your property, sir, I believe?"

Tom began to suspect that his cool visiter had some sinister designs upon his purse; so he jumped from his seat in a rage, and exclaimed:—"Why, who the devil are you, sir, and what do you mean by all these impertinent inquiries? You seem to have made yourself tolerably intimate with my family matters by some means or

other. What advantages am I to be put in possession of by all this roundabout examination?"

"Keep your temper, sir, I beg," said the stranger, as coolly as possible. "I came here for your advantage, sir, and also to get a little piece of information upon my own account."

"Indeed, sir!" said Tom, in high indignation. "I know not *what* you may be, Mr. Blink, or who you may be, beyond your being a most impertinent vagabond. Pray *what* information were you seeking upon your own account?"

"You have given me the information I required, sir," said the stranger, sticking on his white hat, and making for the door.

"But you have told me nothing of the pretended advantages, to myself, sir," said Tom.

"Possibly not, sir," said the stranger. "Our interview is at end, and your advantages all blown to the winds. Good morning, sir—there's my card. You should have kept your temper, sir."

The stranger slipped nimbly out of the room, followed instantly by Tom, who intended to have complimented him with a kick upon his departure, if he could have overtaken him; but he only caught a glimpse of his coat-tails as they whisked out of the street-door, and the impertinent stranger was off. Tom opened the door, intending to follow him, and discover, if possible, who he was. But, to his great annoyance, no person was within sight: his visiter must either have evaporated, or gone into one of the neighbouring houses.

Tom returned and read the card—*Mr. Jeremy Blink, Lyon's Inn*,—and then joined his Aunt, who had by this time dried her tears, and was very busy packing up, to whom he related all that had occurred, and received from her in return much sage advice upon his deportment towards sharpers, house-breakers, and strange men in general. Neither Tom nor his Aunt, however, could give the slightest guess at the reason of the 'fellow's' calling and catechising Tom after the fashion he had done; it was, however, in one respect lucky. The speculations and wonderings in which they both indulged respecting him, diverted their attention from the subject which had lately so occupied their thoughts.

"But you do not mean to say you are going, Aunty, all in such a hurry?" said Tom, suddenly.

"Yes, I do, Master Tom," replied his Aunt. "I mean to go to-morrow, and I am very sorry I did not go yesterday."

"Well, but Aunty——"

"I will not be argued with, Tom."

"Yes, but Mr. Whit——"

"Be quiet, sir."

"Mr. Whittle——"

Aunt Lucy, without waiting for the conclusion of the sentence, shot away like an arrow, and went down stairs and locked herself into her own room, and there sat, until she heard Tom in his apartment, when she returned, and went on with her packing.

Two letters, of dark and villanous import, passed through Her Majesty's Post Office that night; one went on ship-board, and was carried to a far away land, and the other found its way to a wretched little hovel in the North of England; and both contained the information which the cool stranger said he had received from Mr. Thomas Racquet.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FATE OF TOM'S NOTE TO HIS DEARLY BELOVED—AND A JOURNEY TO WESTMORELAND.

Now old Mr. Whittlebury was quite as much annoyed at the events of his last visit to Jermyn Street, as the fair lady he had left behind him, and, like her, consigned poor Tom to all sorts of uncomfortable places.

"Who the devil would have thought of that Tom being up and about just at that unlucky moment!" muttered the old gentleman, as he trotted down Charing Cross, shouldering the people as he went, in very spite. "It will make things turn out a little unlucky; he will be sure to attack me now more fiercely than ever about Caroline, and I am determined that he shall not have her—at any rate, until he is a little more steady. I'll be off out of town for the summer, and take her with me! I want to see a little into the affairs of the Westmoreland mines, and it will be a very good excuse, and a good opportunity also;" and so the old gentleman made his way to the counting-house, and intimated to Mr. Chuck that he had some idea of visiting the works in question in the course of a day or two.

The proceedings of the last month had also not a little perplexed the fluttering heart of the gentle Caroline. The sudden regularity with which her Papa had again taken to the counting-house, after having all but relinquished its duties to the indefatigable Horace Chuck, might

have been accounted for, but for the circumstance that people so situated are not generally anxious about making themselves particularly 'spruce,' merely to sit amongst dusty files and old tin-boxes. "What can it mean?" argued Caroline with herself. "Why should Papa all of a sudden evince so much anxiety about his dress? And why should he be always calling in Jermyn Street and bringing me word how poor Tom is getting on, and yet persist in refusing him the house? It is very mysterious. There seems to be a change coming over him too; he never used to remain silent so long over his tea as he does now."

The young lady continued to puzzle herself after this fashion for some time; until her thoughts, by an easy transition, turned to Tom and his sick-chamber. "Poor fellow!" she sighed;—(alluding to that little three-cornered epistle, which had worked such wonders when delivered by Aunt Lucy);—"he could not answer it. I am sure he would if he had been able; it is silly of me to tax him with neglect and unkindness;" and Caroline sat herself down, took up her knitting, and thought about Tom and his bad arm.

She had scarcely made half-a-dozen stitches, before her attention was drawn to the window by a rapid clatter of horse's feet ringing down the road, as if some animal were galloping for very life.

"Somebody run away with!" thought the young lady, rising and approaching the window in some trepidation. Her fears were, however, groundless; there was nobody being run away with, unless it was the short light wiry savage-looking little brute of a pony himself, by his own evil temper. Upon the back of the little angry animal was perched a small individual in a blue jean frock and red worsted night-cap, with a spur on his right heel and an empty butcher's basket before him—one of those cavaliers who ride any sort of horse, at any sort of pace, down any sort of hill; in truth, the fiery courser bore no less a personage than Master Timothy Maggs, the juvenile butcher, who had been seduced from his employ by Mr. Thomas Racquet, and bribed to turn postman, on that same eventful morning on which Tom had seen the vision of his fair Aunt and Mr. Erasmus Whittlebury through the round pane of glass over the withdrawing door, and who had then and there, as our readers well remember, undertaken to carry a *billet d'amour* with all possible dispatch to that gentleman's intended, but which he had, nevertheless, thought proper to delay until the present moment, having been in part hindered by the necessity of spending the sixpence which was given to him for his trouble.

"Butcher!" shouted the young gentleman, as he pulled his fiery little steed up all of a heap close to the gate of the fore-court.

Nobody answered.

"But-cher!" shouted the gentleman again, totally forgetting that he had a love-letter to deliver, and not a pound of beef-steaks. Getting, however, suddenly impatient of further delay, he moved the pony on to the footpath, in order to besiege the bell,—turning an old lady into the road and throwing her into a great flutter of spirits in doing so. Butcher-boys never dismount.

"But-cher!" shouted the persevering envoy for the third and last time; and then muttered to himself, "Bless'd if they aint all pison'd. Oh! here comes somebody."

Old Bob the gardener popt his visage out of the side-door, and Susan, the maid-of-all-work, exhibited hers out of the top window, and seeing that Mr. Tim Maggs held a letter in his hand, shook their heads at him,—meaning to inform him thereby that he had made a mistake and brought the account to the wrong house. Mister Tim Maggs nodded in reply, and held up the letter.

Susan opened the window. "Do you come from Mr. Brisket, young man? Cos if you don't, you've brought that bill to the wrong house."

Tim shouted "No!" with all his might, and shook the letter again.

"It's all a mistake!" said Bob; thinking, as Susan did, that nothing but a butcher's bill could come by such an ambassador, and knowing that Mr. Brisket's envoy always came on foot, and therefore it could not be from him.

The side door was closed and the upper window shut, and Mr. Maggs left to his meditations: that young gentleman was perplexed for a minute, but catching sight of Miss Whittlebury at the window, held up the letter again, and indulged in some curious pantomime, indicative of his wish to deliver it to her; but Caroline shook her head also and retired. Mr. Tim, thus repulsed at all quarters, growled and flung the rejected epistle over the rails, and galloped away in high displeasure,—a good deal of which he vented upon the vixenish pony, who not being in a whit more amiable mood than his master, resented it after his best fashion, by rasping his rider's legs against the turnpike, and shaving the coach-wheels so closely that his knee-caps stood a very fair chance of being pounded long before they reached home.

The first thing which met the eyes of Mr. Whittlebury upon his return from the City, brimful of indignation against Tom, and running over with disappointment at the unlucky result of his last visit to Jermyn

Street, was the letter which had been so unceremoniously thrown by Timothy Maggs amongst the blossoms of the parterre.

The old gentleman picked it up: it was certainly not quite so fit for a lady's hand as when it had first been intrusted to the care of its scampering messenger; a very palpable impression of a greasy thumb and finger, as if some curious person had been compressing the edges so as to get a peep at the inside, besides many other little impurities unavoidably contracted during its journey in the butcher's basket, soiled its fair proportions; the handwriting too—a sort of broken-backed small text, rambling half over the surface, all down hill, and seemingly written with a skewer—rendered it, in the old gentleman's estimation, a very curious epistle to be addressed to his daughter; he therefore put it into his pocket for examination before delivery.

Mr. Erasmus Whittlebury entered his study, divested himself of his coat, and opened his daughter's letter;—a breach of confidence for which he was immediately punished by the contents. 'Listeners,' they say, 'never hear any good of themselves;' and, by the same rule, peepers (including the immortal Tom himself,—to say nothing of his present worthy imitator,—) never get anything for their pains in the long run but mortification. Very blank was the countenance of the old gentleman, as he spelt through the lines written by the left hand of his young acquaintance Master Thomas Racquet.

"MY DEAREST CARRY,

"I have such news for you! Your worthy Papa has been making most violent love to my Aunt Lucy—(she has been with me for the last month.) I saw them together this morning by the merest accident in the world. Aunty was sitting upon the sofa, and Papa was sitting by her side: he seemed to be speaking very ardently. In one pause of his eloquence, he took her hand and kissed it with a gravity of aspect quite edifying. Aunty snatched it away again, as if it had been burned, and gave him a look,—*such* a look,—more bewitching even than Tommy Moore's wandering lady gave holy St. Kevin.

"Now what this all means you and I must find out. I will come down on Monday next, at four o'clock, and we will consult about it. The old folks must not get married before us, if that is what they mean, for we will make a runaway match of it first.—What say you? You cannot imagine the fun of two such sentimental faces!

"Your own faithful

"Tom."

What kind of effect this epistle might have had upon Caroline, we know not—the effect it had upon her papa, was, to judge from the expression of his countenance, anything but agreeable; however it decided him in his half-formed resolution of visiting the North, and he sought his daughter's presence immediately, and somewhat abruptly announced his intention of treating her to a trip to the Lakes, and expressed his wish that she should hold herself in readiness for the next day's mail.

All the young lady's remonstrances upon the shortness of the time for preparation—all her grief and consternation at having nothing to go in, were treated with the greatest unconcern.

Places were booked immediately for Lancaster, and the next day saw Caroline and her Papa upon their travels; the old gentleman leaving a note for Mr. Horace Chuck, begging him to take up his residence at Stamford Hill during his absence,—a request with which Mr. Horace Chuck immediately complied.

The old gentleman hugged himself with the idea of his generalship in carrying off his daughter before she had seen Tom, and had been by him put in possession of all those little love-passages enacted between himself and that gentleman's Aunt; and, in order to make sure that no information upon that delicate subject should reach his daughter, at any rate for some time to come, demanded a pledge from her, that she should not write to Tom, or receive a letter from him, or even mention his name during their stay in Westmoreland;—a pledge which poor Caroline, more puzzled than ever by her Papa's contradictory behaviour, very reluctantly gave.

The town of Welderton, the destination of Mr. Whittlebury and his fair daughter, was situated about half-a-mile from the beautiful lake of Windermere, and lay upon the side of one of the romantic mountains which environ that beautiful sheet of water. Just out of the town were situated the works belonging to the firm, upon the account of which, as well as for the welfare of his daughter, Mr. Whittlebury had undertaken the journey. The hands,—some two or three hundred in number, including those of other works in the vicinity,—had lately evinced many tokens of discontent, and a general strike had more than once been threatened.

The mine of which the firm of 'Whittlebury and Chuck' had the principal share, was of iron-stone, and called the 'Wren's Nest,' from the circumstance of the principal opening being in the face of an upright rock; all the upper portion, however, open to the daylight, had been

long since exhausted, and a shaft, some few feet from the old work, sunk to a considerable depth. The mine was very extensive, and consisted of several levels or stages down to the bed of a subterranean river, which glided silently and darkly under its high and gloomy arches. Here, deep in the solitude of rock and water, dwelt a race of men, hardy as the stone they worked, and ignorant as the lizard which crawled beneath their feet. Brute animals they were in all, except the outward form; light seemed as foreign to their minds as to their habitations; generation after generation had been born, and bred, and buried, in the vicinity of the mine, and yet the habits and knowledge of the present race were no better than those of the first men who entered the shaft a hundred years ago!

No one had ever thought it worth his while to teach them ought but burrowing in the depths of the earth, and yet "reason" was expected from these untaught wolves. One or two travelling mountebanks, indeed, who had taken that district in their route, had told them of 'Free Trade,' of 'Corn Laws,' of 'Aristocracy,' of 'Grasping Landlords,' of 'the wealth of the soil being all monopolized by the already rich;' and they heard the tale of splendour with which these gentry spiced their discourses, and turned to their own damp walls and rocky arches, and drew comparisons. They heard of silks and velvets, bought for others by the results of *their* labour, and they looked at their rags, and pondered; and in the pauses of their work stood still and consulted, until, at last, they came to the determination, that they would bear their state no longer. '*Slaves!*' they had been told, they were; and the two oratorical mountebanks bid them be thankful for the information thus gratuitously given, and then went on their way, to preach the same doctrine, in the self-same words, to the next hamlet. They spoke not to the poor yet gallant-hearted fellows of the mine of the gentle ties which should hold society together, of the feelings which should bind a family, like *Æsop's* bundle of faggots, into one firm and unshakeable whole; they taught them not to help each other, to be firm in adversity, and thankful in prosperity; no,—all this was matter far beneath the notice of such patriotic minds. They told them not of their duty towards their God;—God! what cared these rambling political spouters for the high behests of Him who inculcates Peace with all Men?—nothing;—but they taught them, suspicion and discontent, to envy their neighbours' welfare, and to covet their neighbours' goods,—and that they were '*Slaves!*'

CHAPTER XIII.

A PROJECT.

ON the morning after Mr. Whittlebury's gallant behaviour in Jermyn Street, Tom accompanied his Aunt to the coach office, and saw her safely deposited in the leathern convenience yclept the 'Regulator,' with her face to the horses;—not, however, before she had given Mr. Barnes ample advice upon the science of driving down hill without upsetting; to which advice Mr. Barnes listened, with a wink in his eye and a finger on his hat, and promised extreme attention. Aunt Lucy then drew up both windows, adjusted her spectacles, opened the book which she had brought to beguile the distance, and made herself comfortable for the journey.

"Glad to see you out again, Mr. Racquet, sir, arter that unlucky spill," said Mr. Barnes, when he had safely caged his talkative customer and given the handle of the coach-door its customary wrench round, by way of preventing her escape. "I'm almost certain I saw that queer old girl as you lent your cloak to when you were down last,—at Pennington it was, where we change; I saw her turn down Bush Lane, by the Spread Eagle there; an old soldier's wife she was by the look of her. I made some inquiry about her at the inn, and Boots said he thought he knew her; so if you like to take a run down and see about it, I think you may get your cloak again. I'm sure it was the same: there was a fellow with her too—a rum-looking kiddy, in a white hat."

"I'll go down with you to-morrow, Barnes," said Tom, briskly. "White hat did you say? Keep my seat for me. There were papers in the cloak pocket which I should not like to lose, and there's a fellow in a white hat that I should very much like to find." And then Tom tapped at the coach-window, to inform his Aunt of his resolution.

The good lady lowered the glass about an inch, and received Tom's communication very graciously, and gave him in return an injunction to come on to Coddlethorpe without fail, and to mind and put on his Macintosh and his boa, and button his coat over his chest, and tie on his shawl, and take care of himself; and then the coach rattled out of the yard, and Aunt Lucy was on the road to her home, brimful of secret indignation against the whole male moiety of the species, and against him in particular who went by the name of Erasmus Whittlebury. She communed with herself upon the journey, and settled that

mention should not be made to her sisters of the wooing proceedings of old Mr. Whittlebury, either by herself or by her Nephew; to which effect, upon her arrival at Coddlethorpe, she indited an epistle to Tom, announcing her safe return, and enjoining him to hold his peace "about the rude behaviour of that foolish old man;" to which Tom answered by return, promising the requisite silence and discretion upon a topic so delicate and embarrassing. And so ended Aunt Lucy's visit to London and Tom's confinement to his sick chamber.

The first thing Tom did after the coach had rattled away with Aunt Lucy was to make inquiry in Lyon's Inn for Mr. Jeremy Blink, and to his great annoyance, though not much to his surprise, no such person was known within that dingy and sequestered locality. So Tom returned to his lodgings, and amused himself the remainder of the day with re-arranging the things which his Aunt, during his illness, had been putting "to rights" for him. His fine old Amati violin had been well scrubbed, and the bowl of his Meerschaum well scraped, to get the dirt off,—at both of which discoveries Tom stormed most lustily, as well he might; his writing-desk too, had been polished, and having been turned upon its side during the operation, the ink had in some measure made free with the contents. All the newspapers, loose prints, and blank sheets lying about were sorted according to their sizes, and piled in one tall tottering pyramid upon the table in neat and comely order: supposing the owner did not want any particular print or paper in a hurry, this arrangement was all very well, but if he did—as of course he would, for things of that sort when they do happen to be so arranged, always are wanted in a hurry—the arrangement was rather distracting than otherwise. Tom smiled at his Aunt's methodical habits, and once again reduced the papers to order, by classification.

His books too, although not very many, were all ranged according to their heights—all the little ones together and all the large ones by themselves; so that 'Jack Sheppard' and 'Oliver Twist' stood among the 'Divines of the Church of England,' and the 'Devil in London' and the 'Complete Lawyer' somewhat unceremoniously rubbed shoulders. Tom pished and pshawed a great deal, and, after a little perseverance, brought them all back again to their old places. He had just concluded the arrangement, when the shrill cry of "But-cher" arrested his attention, and the well-known round red face of Master Timothy Maggs reminded him of his letter to Caroline. Tom essayed to open a communication with his youthful envoy by means of the window; but the window had been hermetically sealed by the careful

Aunt Lucy; the door was the only alternative. Upon being appealed to as to the fate of the note entrusted to his care, the juvenile purveyor of mutton and beef responded and said, with a grin, that "Bless'd if he know'd wot had come on it: he had shied it over the railins, cos the young lady as lived there vouldn't have it no other vay—at no price."

Tom opened his eyes, and shut the door, and pondered deeply. "Very strange," thought he, "the initials were in the corner; she must have known it was from me. I'll set off instantly and see what it is, and call the old gentleman to account at the same time for kissing my Aunt;—demand his intentions in fact, with all due and proper ceremony." And Tom smiled, as he fancied how Mr. Erasmus Whittlebury would look, upon so grave and formal an application.

"Confound that fellow's stupidity though," said Tom, as his thoughts once again recurred to the letter. "If he has 'shied it over the railins' (as he says), and the old gentleman has picked it up, there will be a pretty to-do. I'll even set off at once: so here goes."

Just as Tom had made up his mind, and had half divested himself of his morning gown, the door flew open, and he was saluted by his friend Harry Rattleton.

"Hah! Hah! Old fellow, how are you?—and how's the wing, Eh? Confound it, do take that red cap off; you look like a physic bottle, red papered and all, ready for delivery." And Mr. Harry Rattleton threw himself unceremoniously into the nearest chair, put down his hat upon the table, flung his gloves into it one after the other, thrust his fingers through his long black hair, and waited for a reply.

"Oh, getting quite fierce again," said Tom. "Glad to see you Harry: how are Phillpots and Charley?"

"Oh, both right as trivets, and ready for anything. Cruel case your being knocked up though; there has been plenty of fun going."

And then Mr. Harry Rattleton looked round him, and either seeing or fancying he saw a more bachelor-like air about the apartment, exclaimed, "By the bye, where's the *chevaux de frise*?—gone home? That's good. I have come to finish the sentence which she so cruelly interrupted the other morning. I have tried to get up to you several times since, but it was no use. But what think you? Horace has promised you what he calls 'a good quilting,' the very next time you show at Stamford Hill."

"No danger! no danger!" laughed Tom. "Horace Chuck is the veriest coward that ever wore a white feather. You should have

seen how he bolted the other moonlight night, when he walked over the white cow. She had gone to sleep in the pathway, and Horace never saw her until he tumbled over her. Egad! I do not know which scuttled away the quickest—the valiant Horace or poor Crombie.”

“Well, we are going to give him a lesson,” said Mr. Harry Rattleton. “Bob Phillpots and I—and we want you to join us, to see the fun—we are going to rob him.”

“Rob him!” said Tom, with a grin of astonishment.

“Yes—regularly and seriously, and in proper highwayman style—rob him!” replied Harry, enjoying Tom Racquet’s surprise; “and give him a dinner afterwards.”

“What do you mean?”

“Why, you must know that he favoured us after supper the other night with such histories of bloody battles, and hair-breadth escapes, in all of which he acted the hero in such superlative style, that we were a little astonished at our own insignificance, by comparison, and felt quite cut out and ashamed of ourselves in never having been attacked by midnight thieves and cut-throats dire. Among other things, we got out of him that he leaves town to-morrow night for Bedford, upon one of his business journeys. He drives in his own gig, and carries pistols. Now our plan is to give him a meeting just out of Pennington; there is a long narrow lane there, up which he must go—stop him regularly—ease him of his pocket book and pistols—get back to town again before him, and leave them at his counting-house for him, with a little note congratulatory of their recovery;—he will be sure to return when he finds that he’s robbed;—invite him to a dinner a day or two afterwards, confess the robbery, and laugh at him.”

“A very good joke,” said Tom, “but rather ticklish: he may show fight, and hit somebody with those clumsy horse-pistols of his.”

“Oh, devil a bit! he will be in too much of a quake to hit anything,” said Mr. Rattleton.

“Well, I should like to see how he will act in such a dilemma,” replied Tom. “I cannot take an active part in the fun, because of my arm; but I’ll put on my cloak and join you. I have a little inquiry to make in that very quarter, about the cloak I lost the last time I was down that road.”

“Well then, you’ll go?” said Mr. Rattleton, sticking his hat on all on one side.

“I will! I’ll run down a little before you, get my business over,

and join you at the 'Spread Eagle' by five o'clock. I'll order dinner for the lot, and we'll have a night of it," said Tom, with great alacrity;—his love of mischief, and the idea of showing up his rival, totally upsetting all prudential considerations.

"Hurrah for the road!" shouted his volatile companion, bursting out into a laugh. "We will give him a lesson." Mr. Harry Rattleton's laugh was a little subdued by a startling knock at the door, and the subsequent entrance of Mr. Bob Phillpots and Mr. Charles Rattleton,—who no sooner discovered the cause of the cachination than they joined their sweet voices, and the merry quartett laughed in chorus at the anticipated success of their undertaking. And thus it was agreed that Mr. Harry Rattleton and Mr. Bob Phillpots were to rob Mr. Horace Chuck, all in fun and good faith, and Mr. Charles Rattleton and Mr. Thomas Racquet were to be there to see.

"Good bye, old fellow," said the three amateur robbers to their companion Tom, when some further matters had been adjusted as to dress, arms, &c.—"Good bye, old fellow; take care of your wing." And Mr. Harry Rattleton and his brother, with Mr. Bob Phillpots, made their somewhat noisy exit.

As soon as Mr. Thomas Racquet's three noisy acquaintances had disappeared, old Dame Prudence gave a twitch or two at his conscience, for which she was immediately smothered by that gentleman, and once again consigned to the back store-house of his mind, as a piece of troublesome lumber. We suppose the old lady had contrived to get out from there during Tom's illness, and make friends a little with him; certainly they had had a few conferences together about past and by-gone matters, while he was sipping his gruel, and bolting his pills, and making wry faces over his physic,—to all of which he lent an attentive and serious ear, and even went so far as to express an opinion in consonance with the old lady's upon many of his late pranks; why however he should have smothered her, the moment she attempted to interfere with any thing he was about to do—now he *was* able to do something—seems to be a mystery, unless, like many others of his age, he was a very ungrateful young fellow, and deserved all that the old lady threatened him with while he was locking her up again.

"Now for it!" said Tom; "Stamford Hill!" Hat and gloves were donned in a moment, and Tom clattered down the Haymarket, and along the Strand, in a particularly lively cab, which was always getting one of its hind wheels into the iron gutter and sidling along famously before it got out again, and then darting in between sulky coal wag-gons and racing round omnibuses, and escaping without a scar or a

scratch,—where a gentlemanly cab would have had its sides driven in, and its wheels pulled off, before you could wink, if it had attempted half such vagaries ;—the horse trotting with his hind legs and galloping with his fore legs the whole distance.

Tom reached the 'Flower Pot' in good time, and scrambled up to the roof of the Stamford-Hill coach just after a tall thin gentleman,—in fact the gentleman's heel very nearly combed Tom's whiskers, so closely did they follow each other in the ascent. "Hallo!" said Tom in surprise, as the gentleman indignantly pulled the tail of his coat from under him as soon as he had seated himself; "How are you?"

It was Mr. Horatio Chuck, upon his way to his temporary home.

Mr. Horace Chuck, seeing the box disengaged, threw his long legs over the cushion, and slid from his seat on the roof to that more favoured locality, saying he was "middlin" as he did so; he was however obliged to relinquish his seat and scramble back again immediately afterwards when coachee and his particular chum made their appearance, at which Tom smiled. Horace felt very much inclined to give Tom a lift as the coach started, and so leave him in the kennel; but not knowing what consequences might ensue therefrom, he contented himself with driving Tom as close to the hand-rail as he could, so that the iron, although it did not enter his soul, certainly tickled his side in no inconsiderable degree. Tom hated to be squeezed at any time; but to have a great long-legged clock-case of a fellow sitting over him, when there was not the slightest necessity for it, was rather too much for his temper, so he stopped the coach and took his seat inside, after exchanging a complimentary epithet with his tormentor.

As the coach drew up at the well-known cottage, Mr. Chuck skipped nimbly from the roof and ran up to the door while Tom was puzzling after his purse, so that by the time he reached the three little steps, Horace had vanished into the house.

"Out of town!" said Tom, in astonishment, when old Bob announced the absence of his master and young mistress.

"Yes, sir, out of town!" drawled Mr. Chuck, re-appearing from the parlour, and pulling his stay-at-home coat over his shoulders, and looking Tom very significantly in the face all the while. "Out of town, sir! out of town! Tom *won't* walk in, I suppose."

"Where have they gone to, Bob?" said Tom, addressing the old man servant, and taking no notice of Mr. Chuck's studied impertinence.

"Gone to the Lakes for a month or two, sir," said old Bob.

"You may shut the door, Bob," said Mr. Chuck.

"Not while I am standing upon the steps, sir, I take it," said Tom, with some asperity.

"You are not glued to the steps, that I know of, sir," said Mr. Chuck. "You are not bound to stand upon the steps, that I ever heard of."

"Right, sir, right; I shall walk into the parlour and write a small note," said Tom, getting warmer and warmer.

"Scarcely, without *my* permission," rejoined Mr. Chuck, drawing himself up, and thrusting his hands to the bottom of his coat tail pockets, as if feeling for his courage, in case Tom should become bellicose and dangerous.

Tom walked quietly up the steps, stalked majestically past Horace, and sat himself down in the parlour, saying as he did so, "I know of no authority, sir, which you can possess, as a mere visiter here, like myself, by which you can exclude *me*, who am about to be allied to the family."

"I am resident here for the present, sir, if you must know," said Mr. Chuck, flogging himself with his coat tails; "and do not choose to have my premises intruded upon by any one; and as to the alliance you speak of, you need not make quite so sure of that—circumstances in your life, sir, which have lately come to light——"

"WHAT!" said Tom, in so loud and sharp a tone that Mr. Chuck's ears rang again.

"Nothing," said that gentleman, and he sat down, very white in the face, but very coolly notwithstanding, and amused himself with taking to pieces a huge horse-pistol.

"I am going on a little journey to-morrow, Mr. Racquet, and have some few things to do. I wish you would leave the house," said Mr. Chuck after a short silence, holding a screw between his teeth, and looking with a vengeful eye upon Tom.

Tom started from his seat and left the house, with all his uncertainty relieved as to the author of a great many annoying little pieces of scandal which from time to time had found their way to Stamford Hill.

Mr. Chuck indulged himself with one of his usual grins when Tom had departed, and in the deep silent bog of his mind did he turn over scheme after scheme for blighting Tom's happiness and carrying off Caroline; and, unluckily for Tom, the events of the next evening gave him the very hold he required.

CHAPTER XIV.

ROBBERY—(AMATEUR.)

IF Tom had had any compunctious visitings the day before about robbing Mr. Horace Chuck, there were certainly none of them left on the following morning, and he went about the necessary arrangements with dispatch—called upon his friends on his way to the coach office, and rattled down to Pennington with all speed, there to make inquiry about the lost cloak, and await the arrival of his fellow conspirators.

Mr. Barnes pulled up in due time, and deposited Mr. Thomas under the wings of the 'Spread Eagle;' or, in other words, under the portico of the hostelry bearing that sign. Tom forthwith refreshed himself with a glass of sherry and then commenced his search.

Bush Lane—as if to render its name more striking upon the fancy of the wayfarer, or else out of that pure opposition in the nature of lanes and streets, which always gets them christened as far from their appearance as possible—had only one bush in it from end to end, and that was a brick and mortar bush, a little low beer house of more than doubtful reputation. The rest of the lane was across a heath open on both sides, until it reached a spot called Beech End, where a picturesque group of trees formed a boundary as it were to the sterility of the district: here also were the cross-roads leading to Beech-End and Grimsby.

To this little public house Tom directed his steps, and made inquiry of Mrs. Jolly, the landlady,—describing the old woman, to whom he had lent his cloak, as well as he could.

Mrs. Jolly looked at him intently for a half-minute, and then replied that "she know'd no sich person." Two or three rough suspicious looking fellows, with short pipes in their mouths, and who were sitting at a table, stayed their conversation, and looked round at him likewise.

"I think I know her," said one of them, suddenly addressing Tom in a free and easy kind of manner, and coming forward at the same time; "tallish old gal, warn't she?"

"Yes," said Tom, "and wore a blue cloak."

"With a reg'lar bow-wow collar," replied the other.

Tom pocketed this affront to his splendid bit of sable, and said "Yes."

"Her name's Walker. Bill, it's Tibby Walker the gentleman wants, as lives down by you."

'Bill' and his companions immediately came forward and clustered round Tom, all eager in their direction. Tibby Walker lived at Grimsby, about two miles from the 'Cross'—he could not miss it—straight down the lane and turn to the right.

Tom finding the distance more than he had anticipated, returned to the 'Spread Eagle,' and deferred further search until the morrow.

The four fellows, as soon as he had taken his departure re-seated themselves, and the spokesman of the party, one Mr. Jack Smashwood, giving a sly glance at his companions, one after the other, and thrusting his tongue into his cheek, very waggishly exposed the corner of a small Russia leather pocket-book above the edge of the table, and danced it up and down with much pleasant humour. A hearty laugh was the response to this bit of pleasantry, and Mr. Jack Smashwood, after one or two more punchinello movements of the article, applied himself seriously to examine the contents. It is scarcely necessary to say that the book was the property of Mr. Thomas Racquet, and had been dexterously extracted from his pocket during his inquiry about the cloak.

"A flimsy five. Good!" said Mr. Smashwood, producing a bank-note for that amount, and placing it upon the table.

"Another flimsy five. Good again!" continued Mr. S., as if he were examining an inventory.

"A bit of somebody's vig. Rum!" said Mr. S., opening a small packet and exposing a dearly-prized dark and silken tress, once—oh, ye powers!—waving upon the delicate neck of the pretty Caroline Whittlebury. Mr. S. placed it upon the table—it was immediately seized by one of his companions, and facetiously immersed in that gentleman's peculiar half-pint of heavy.

"A Hallmanack; a letter; a copy of worses; a tailor's bill, with a blowing up cos it aint paid; a queer little pink cocked hat of a note—that's a love letter, I'll bet—*Mr. Thomas Racquet, Jermyn Street, London*: that's him, I s'pose," said Mr. Smashwood, looking about him.

Further conversation was stopped for a moment by the entrance of a musical individual in a smockfrock, singing "Nix my dolly pals." He wore his waggoner's hat with a jaunty air, and carried himself with a genuine devil-may-care swagger; he brought his long body unceremoniously into the room, thrust his long legs under the table, and stared at the assembled company with the greatest coolness imaginable.

"Well, Dick, my buak," said Mr. Smashwood, "how aint you?"

"Tol lol," replied Mr. Richard Gardner of Coddlethorpe, with a grin and a wink, and a hiccup, which seemed to intimate that he had been studying other things beside agriculture that morning.

"Anything up?" enquired Mr. Smashwood, in continuation.

"*Wee*, as they say in France," said Dick, "the 'Fox' is up—done up, reg'larly—smashed by them three Rackety old cats at the Hall; but they haven't got me out yet tho'—and won't for some time to come—I'm not a-going to be started like a Tom cat when an old woman cries 'Whist!'"

"What's come of your old dad then, if the 'Fox' is done up?" continued the interrogator.

"Oh, blow him!—I don't know; I gave him a bit of a licking for meddling, and he's bolted," replied the fellow. "The three Miss Racquets got scent of the row, and gave me notice to quit—the house belongs to them, you see."

"Why, we have had the cock-bird of that nest here just now—Young Racquet," said Mr. Smashwood, "and we did just take the liberty of borrowing his pocket-book, and sending him on a wild-geese chase afterwards."

"Sarve him right," replied the fellow, "I wish I could fire the old cats' nest for them, and hang him up to roast in the flames—just as I'd got the ken so snug and all too: its d—— vexatious!"

"So it is," replied his friend. "Well, we must look out for other quarters in that part."

"But about the business of to-night?" said Dick Gardner. "Toby or not toby?—that's the question; cos I aint a-going to have all my hanging about here thrown away you know, half buried in that confounded drain. I must be there again to-night I suppose?"

"Oh, toby, of course," replied Mr. S., "we are all here o'purpose;" and Mr. S. produced Tom's pocket-book again, and began emptying it of its contents, prior to a fair partition among his companions.

"Give us the skin," said Dick, as Smashwood was on the point of throwing the empty book into the fire.

The 'skin' was thrown across the table to him, and the party broke up for the present; Mr. Smashwood directing his steps towards London until he reached a lane, in the narrowest part of which stood a small pawnbroker's shop, kept by one Mr. James Black, or Old Dingy, as he was more familiarly called by the many waggish gentlemen of his acquaintance.

Mr. Smashwood made entry beneath the three golden balls with the contents of Mr. Racquet's book, and just three half-pence in his pocket; and emerged therefrom a few minutes after, minus everything except the half-pence, and plus sixty shillings of the coin of this realm—that sum being the market price of two five pound notes at the time we speak of: Old Dingy remarking that since the introduction of omnibuses, the articles in question had become quite a drug in the market.

Tom returned to the 'Spread Eagle' and ordered dinner for the party, and amused himself with walking until the arrival of his friends, and planning a trip to the Lakes in pursuit of old Mr. Whittlebury and his fair daughter. "I must coax Aunt Lucy to go with me though—and contrive to throw the old folks in each other's way again—and then let me alone for a trip to Gretna with Caroline!" said Tom, his eyes sparkling at the anticipated success of his pursuit.

Mr. Harry Rattleton, Mr. Bob Phillpots, Mr. Charles Rattleton, and Tom, all dined together shortly afterwards, preparatory to their first appearance in the characters of highwaymen: great and uproarious was the fun over the wine, and sundry bets were made as to the extent of white feather likely to be shown by their victim.

As the time approached for the attempt, four short black cloaks were produced by the indefatigable Mr. Harry Rattleton, purchased from the store of Mr. Moses of masquerade notoriety; four black crape masks were exhibited by Mr. Bob Phillpots, all of his own manufacture; a very slaughterous and savage looking stone-ware pocket-pistol was produced by Tom, who first of all presented it to his own head and lodged the contents in his mouth, and smacking his lips when he had discharged it, laid it upon the table.

"It's all very well, boys," said Mr. Thomas Racquet, when all these implements were displayed; "but I was down at Stamford Hill last night, and had the satisfaction of seeing Master Horace preparing a huge blunderbuss of a horse-pistol for this very trip: suppose he should hit one of us—he's a clumsy dog!"

"Hit one of us! he could not hit a hay-stack!" exclaimed Mr. Charles Rattleton; "besides, look here, the very sight of this—(holding up the earthenware pistol)—will make him as nervous as Bob's father when he put his boots on in a hurry and found half a dozen black beetles struggling away under the hollow of his foot—the old gentleman had a peculiar horror of black beetles."

"N.B.," said Bob.—"Tight fits and no boot-jack, and the old gentleman very ticklish!"

"Ay, ay! all very well," said Tom, putting on his argumentative aspect; "but that will not mend a hole in any one's body, if he should be awkward enough to drill one."

"Tom, you're getting spooney," said Mr. Harry Rattleton, flinging a nut at him.

"Devil a bit!" said Tom.

"Never say die!" exclaimed Mr. Bob Phillpots. "We'll keep a look out for all that—and capture the pistol, and add it to the spoils next morning. By the bye, Tom, come sing us—'Never say die.'"

"Never say die! never say die!" exclaimed all four at once, rattling glasses and knives and plates together by way of enforcing their request. Of course, Tom had got a cold and a bad memory, but he sung nevertheless—

- "We are all of us scions of sturdy John Bull,
Trusty chips of the old block, and hate a white feather,
And when old John wants it, we'll all give a pull,
A long pull, a strong pull, and a pull altogether.
If surly old Care in among us should steal,
Let him groan and be hang'd, we'll defy the old mocker;
Take hope to our hearts, put our strength to the wheel,
And never say die while a shot's in the locker!"

And then all four gentlemen broke out with the last two lines in chorus, each singing it to his own variation of the original air. Tom proceeded—

- "We all of us love stout old John's fire-side,
And we'll fight for it all of us, younger and older,
And cling round it most when worst evils betide,
And protect it like Highlanders, shoulder to shoulder;
We may bend for a bit, while a storm hurtles by—
But should grim old Despair come—the blue-visag'd mocker—
One jolly ha! ha! shall soon start him, but 'die,'
Why we'll *never* say die, while we've Horz in the locker!"

Two wine glasses and one dessert plate went the way of all brittleness, during the applause and chorus which followed at the conclusion of this ditty. There is nothing like having intimate friends for an audience: it is astonishing how delighted they always are.

"Beautiful evening, by Jove!" said Mr. Charles Rattleton, putting aside the curtains. "Fine moonlight night—just the very thing—let us have some coffee, and then sally forth."

The proposal was instantly acceded to; coffee was brought and despatched, the four masks were distributed and deposited in four respective coat-tail pockets, the four mourning cloaks were crammed into the crowns of the four hats, and the pistol was recharged with brandy-and-water, and handed to Mr. Harry Rattleton, who was "first robber for that night only." Thus prepared, the four conspirators sallied forth to the cross-road at Beech End, there to lie leaguer until the arrival of their victim.

The cross-road at Beech End was a very picturesque little spot, especially by moonlight, and just the very place of all others for a polite amateur robbery: tall feathery trees were there, gently bowing in the wind and waving their obeisance to the queen of night, and high shelving banks on either side, covered with honeysuckle and wild convolvulus shut in the corn fields, a felled tree or two just in the shadow, and lastly a capital deep dry ditch in which to hide, while parties not in the secret were passing by.

It was resolved that this last locality should be the tiring room, so down the shelving bank slid all four conspirators, and adjusted their masks and cloaks ready for immediate action; Mr. Harry Rattleton and Mr. Phillpots undertaking the adventure by themselves—the others to remain in reserve should further aid be necessary: and so they reclined upon the banks, two and two opposite each other, and waited.

"How quiet the night is," said Tom at last, in a sort of half-whisper, as if he were afraid of disturbing the stillness of the moonlight.

No answer was returned to Tom's remark, for all experienced that vague and subdued kind of feeling which creeps over the heart on a still summer night.

"What lights are those?" said Harry Rattleton in a low tone, pointing across the country to two little bright specks which had just appeared.

"That near one," said Tom, "must be from a little beer shop—I was there this morning; and the other must be from a farm-house I saw as I came out—about half a mile up the lane."

Again all was silent for a few minutes; presently the sound of wheels, and the measured trot of a horse, were borne upon the night breeze, and put them all upon the alert.

Mr. Henry Rattleton brought his eyes upon a level with the road, and watched the vehicle as it turned the corner:—a butcher's cart rolled smartly passed them, and once again all was calm and still.

A weary half-hour elapsed, during which a great deal of the daring courage which had brought them together oozed out of the four gentlemen's fingers' ends,—causing most of them—if the truth were told—to wish themselves safely back again. Gladly would they have relinquished their enterprise and allowed Mr. Horace Chuck to carry himself and his swaggering braggadocio home unmolested; but no one liked to be the first to recant, and so all four stayed true to their colours,—like many other equally brave fellows, when they found out that it required more courage to run away than to remain.

During one of the long pauses which now disjointed their remarks, they imagined that a sound, as of some person breathing heavily, fell upon the ear: all listened, and looked in each other's faces.

A long drawn breath evidently was audible—and that not very far from them.

Tom pointed towards a little archway, thrown across the ditch to carry the road into the corn-field.

"The noise comes from there," said Tom in a whisper.

All four leaned forward and listened again intently, holding their breaths.

"I fancy I can see a man's leg, there—just by that stone in the moonlight," said Tom again, still in the same cautious and subdued tone.

This was rather an unpleasant discovery, for more reasons than one, and startled the four amateur robbers not a little; the individual with the moonlit leg must, from his proximity, have gathered from their conversation the nature of their employment,—provided he were not fast asleep, as the sounds of hard breathing almost indicated. What could *he* want there at that time of night, was the question: be he a wide-awake officer, or be he a fast-asleep civilian, his participation in their secret was far from pleasant.

"See, See!" said Tom again, as he thought he perceived the leg drawn gradually and slowly out of sight within the dark shadow of the little arch.

A gentle 'click—click' came from the same quarter as Tom finished his *sotto voce* exclamation: it was not a noise caused by the striking of pebbles against each other, or of broken glass, or loose mortar falling into the ditch—but two distinct measured and metallic sounds peculiarly sharp upon the ear.

"That's the cocking of a pistol, as sure as I'm alive," said Harry Rattleton. "There is somebody hidden here for no good, I'm certain."

—(Harry had become supernaturally virtuous all of a sudden.)—We must have a search—where is the lantern, Charley?" A lucifer match was produced, and that useful instrument for bothering everybody duly ignited. All four then got upon their legs, and proceeded to storm the little archway; a brilliant ray of light was firstly thrown into the dark vista, by way of forlorn hope, and then Tom and his companions prepared to follow.

The archway was not above four feet in height, and just of sufficient breadth to carry the road, and was filled with broken bottles, superannuated tin pots, bricks, and other like matters inimical to corns and tender feet.

"We must creep through," said Harry, after having examined the entrance.

"And get our heads broken as we come out on the other side," said Bob Phillips.

"Give me the light," said Tom. "Here goes—I'm sure I saw a fellow's leg. Hallo! look there!—stole away, stole away!" And Tom pointed to a young hazel which grew out of the bank at the other extremity of the archway, and which was violently shaken and held down, as if by some heavy weight clinging to it, and then suddenly recovered its position again, as if released from its temporary pendant load.

"No tree shakes in the wind that fashion," said Tom: "we have been watched—and there goes the watcher—we must shift our quarters. He must have climbed up by the aid of that tree."

All four scrambled out of the ditch, and Harry Rattleton mounted the gate leading into the corn field, clinging to the same hazel which had attracted their attention, and stood upon the top rail: nothing but the silver headed corn, waving in the night-wind met his eye. "I can see no one," said he, after a pause.

"I am sure I saw a fellow's leg, there," said Tom, "and that click, click, means mischief somehow—but hark! hark!" There was a sound of some approaching vehicle, and all jumped down again into the ditch; they must have allowed the more distant indication of its approach to have escaped them in their anxiety, for no sooner did the rattle reach their ears, than the horse turned the corner and was upon them—it was the same light butcher's cart which had passed about twenty minutes before.

"Where can that chap have been to, I wonder?" said Tom, "there's nothing within six miles of us in that direction."

"I do not much like all this," said Bob, when the cart had passed. "Robbery is all very fine fun when you have it all to yourself; but if any one else joins in the dance it is none so pleasant: let us go through the archway and make all sure."

Bending themselves nearly double, the four conspirators, preceeded by the dark lantern, entered the suspected hiding place, feeling their way as they went.

"Warm, by Jupiter!" cried Bob Phillpots, as he placed his hand upon the shelving bank, from which the arch was sprung.

As Tom, followed by Harry Rattleton, came to the same spot, their hands fell upon a part of the brick-work upon the opposite side, which was also warm. "Some one has been hiding here, that's certain," was the exclamation from all parties, "and our presence has disturbed them. I wish their intention may be no worse than ours." Again a silence rested upon the whole party.

"Oh! it was only some gipsies," said Tom suddenly, and in the tone of a man upon whom a bright thought has unexpectedly flashed.

None spoke; although, perhaps, all imagined that this interpretation was the right one.

"Oh, hang it; let us play out the play now we are here," said Mr. Harry. "He will pass in a minute or two, and gipsies or no gipsies they are off—out of our way. 'Never say die,' Tom, Eh? Get to your gear, lads."

A would-be merry laugh responded to Mr. Harry's sally, and all were once more at their old quarters.

They had scarcely settled themselves when a distant rattle of another light vehicle put them all upon the alert—the thoughts of the gipsies vanished—the four robbers adjusted their cloaks and masks ready for action. Mr. Harry Rattleton, as the proposer of the fun, took upon himself to essay the robbery in person, assisted by Bob Phillpots, who was to stop the horse with all proper ferocity; while the other two were to remain in reserve.

"Keep your heads down now, while he turns the corner," whispered Tom, handing Harry the pistol; "that's him, I know his shining hat."

A light gig, drawn by a sleepy sort of horse, turned the corner at a steady trot, and Mr. Horace Chuck was in the gig, smoking his cigar in happy unconsciousness of approaching danger. Gently he approached, until directly opposite the ambuscade.

"Stand and deliver!" said Bob in a loud voice, suddenly springing out and seizing the horse by the bridle.

"Money or your life!" said Harry Rattleton, after the most approved highwayman tones, mounting on to the step of the gig and snatching the reins out of the astonished Horace's hand, and presenting the pistol—(well-loaded with brandy and water)—at his head.

Mr. Horace Chuck was paralyzed: he held back his head from the pistol—put up his hand to catch the bullet, should it escape by accident—dropped his jaw and recovered it again, took several gasping mouthfuls of moonlight, and glared with all his might at the robber.

"Do you hear?" said Harry, giving his victim a dig in the waistcoat with the muzzle of his brandy and water loaded weapon.

The hand of the trembling traveller sought his coat pocket and laid hold of the knob of his huge horse-pistol, but not a ray of comfort did its presence shed upon his wandering senses. He might as well have held the tail of his horse, for all he knew about it.

"Quick—quick!" said Harry in gruff and grumbling tones. "Money or your life!"

Horace drew forth the pistol.

"Thank'ee," said the robber, seizing it almost before poor Horace thought it was out of his pocket. "Thank'ee! dip again, old fellow."—Horace hesitated. "Come!—(another dig in the chest)—dip again, I say."

A second trembling dive into the side pocket, accompanied by another mouthful of moonlight, produced a large black leather note-case, and Horace Chuck suddenly stood up.

"Pray sit down, sir," said Harry, pulling at his coat-tails, and still balancing himself upon the step of the gig.

Bob Phillpots suddenly drew the horse on, by way of enforcing his friend's request—the effect of which was, of course, to throw Horace off his balance. He sat down involuntarily, clinging to the robber to avoid pitching out over the back of the gig. Harry Rattleton tried to disengage himself; but the more he tried, with the more nervous tenacity did Horace hold on, until, after a few minutes' struggle, he found his head regularly 'in chancery'—safely packed, that is, under Horace Chuck's arm. Horace tried spasmodically to roar "Murder," but his tongue refused its office. He had got, for once, the head of a real live thief under his arm, and his heart thumped against his side like a mill-hammer;—this unexpected movement had obliged Harry to get bodily into the gig: Horace hugged like a bear, and clung

like a boa constrictor, opening and shutting his mouth like an immense toy nut-cracker.

"Let go, you fool!" said Harry, struggling up in the gig, and causing Horace to stand up likewise.

Bob, who was enjoying the fun at the horse's head, again drew the gig on suddenly, and Mr. Harry Rattleton, with Mr. Horace Chuck round his neck, tumbled all of a heap into the road; their fall was however broken by Messrs. Charles Rattleton and Tom, who came up when they found their "first robber" in such an awkward predicament.

Horace sprang to his feet in a moment, and giving one hurried glance at the four black masked figures which surrounded him, took to his heels, and ran like a greyhound, leaving his shining broad-brim and his gig behind him.

"Send his horse after him, Bob," said Tom, picking up the whip and sticking Horace's hat on the top of it and then fixing it securely in its place.

Bob gave the horse a cut with his stick, and away he rattled in the same direction as his master.

The fears of poor Horace soon converted the rattle at his heels into the noise of pursuit, so he fled with the wings of the wind—rushed into the town—up the high street, and plunged down the dark gateway of the Spread Eagle Inn at Pennington.

"Robb'd and murder'd! robb'd and murder'd!" shouted Horace, as he ran down the dark yard, followed by the horse and gig, and a whole host of townspeople.

"Well, you make noise enough for a murdered man, wherever you be," said the fat landlord, puffing between each word, and making his appearance from a little side-door, and trying to see down the dark yard what all the clatter was about; the ostler at the same time came out of the stable with an old horn-sided lantern, containing a half-suffocated candle, which he called a light, in his hand; the yard was pitch dark, except from the occasional twinkle of a bed-room light from an upper window. "Where are you?" shouted the ostler. Horace had run right down the yard and had got into a shed at the bottom, among the carriages.

"Robb'd and murder'd! robb'd and murder'd!" gasped Horace again.

"Robb'd you may ha' been," said the ostler, going up to him and elevating the light, "but I'm bless'd if you'r murder'd. Why don't you come in, sir?"

All the ostlers and helpers, and stable boys, and post-boys, besides



"BORED AND BORED"

the idlers from the gateway, clustered round Horace in a minute, all elbowing each other to catch a glimpse of the murdered man by the light of the ostler's suffocated candle, and treading ruthlessly on each other's heels, and grumbling incessantly. Horace allowed himself to be conducted up to the house by the pursy landlord, who, although not so quick as his servants, had at last contrived to waddle to the end of the yard.

"That the gentleman's gig, Jim?" said he, pointing to a vehicle which was standing just within the gateway.

"S'pose so, sir; it run in arter him," said the ostler. "Why, bless'd if the gentleman's hat arn't stuck a top of his whip!"

The ostler took the horse affectionately by the nose and led him into the stable; the landlord took Horace nervously by the button and led him into the bar.

Such a tale as Horace told! the adventures of 'Jack the Giant Killer' were nothing to it; the landlady trembled—the landlady's daughter turned pale with affright, and blushed with admiration at the heroic daring of the narrator—the landlord stared with all his eyes—we do not mean to say that he had more than the ordinary complement, but that he used that complement to the uttermost, by expanding them until they were (poetically speaking) the size of saucers.

The chambermaids and the barmails, and the maids of all-work—all declared themselves frightened out of their precious wits, and made engagements with each other, upon the spot, to sleep five in a bed for mutual protection.

"Send for old Sniffit, the constable! Away, Jim Ostler, as fast as you can!" said the excited landlady, calling out of a side window.

Away scampered Jim Ostler up the yard, his wooden shoes making such a clattering as he went that the very fowls untucked their heads from their wings, let down their legs, and winked again with surprise.

Mr. Sniffit, the constable, of course, was not to be found. There seems to be a curious circumstance in the natural history of constables—they never *are* to be found when they are wanted; perhaps, it is because people have no business to want them when they are out of the way. Mr. Sniffit's case, in this instance, was however an exception; he had already been sent for, and found, in consequence of a desperate robbery at Beech End Farm-House, then just perpetrated.

He made his appearance however at last, fiery-red with haste—bustled into the bar, and almost without waiting for Mr. Chuck's narrative, expressed his opinion, that "these were rum times to live

in—that things must be looked to—that gover'nment ought to take it up. Here were two robberies in the quiet town of Pennington, and both in one night; that the thieves were evidently Londonners, and that they must not be allowed to run such rigs in the provinces." Mr. Sniffit wound up his opening speech, and looked as if he thought no one but a Penningtonian had any right to rob in the neighbourhood, and that the London chaps ought to be punished, if it were only for poaching upon other people's preserves.

"Take a glass of brandy, Sniffit?"

"Well, thank'ee, sir; I don't know but I will," said the officer. "Here's to you, sir, and the ladies, and you, sir," continued Mr. Sniffit, bowing all round, and then throwing the contents down his throat.

"There has been four or five suspicious-looking fellows hanging about for the last week or so," said the constable, smacking his lips; "they had a light butcher's cart with them; they've cracked Master Plowden's front door in at last, and carried off every thing. I thought they were up to no good, and so I watched 'em till they gave me the slip—I'll be bound it's the same party."

Here Horace broke in, and described the robbers who had eased him of his book. Four men, each six feet high, armed with pistols and blunderbusses, daggers and drawn swords—dreadful though the tale was, when first told to the landlord and the party in the bar, it was nothing to this, the second edition—it seemed now as if the modesty of the narrator had suppressed at least half of it; indeed the tale, while being again narrated, seemed to grow so under the hands of its hero, that Mr. Sniffit had whole armies of London cut-throats, and magazines of 'jemmies' and 'persuaders' floating before his eyes in a minute. The more Horace told, the more there seemed to tell, especially with relation to his own personal prowess in struggling with two of the ruffians.

"Please, sir, we found this here pist'l in the gig," said the ostler, entering the bar.

"That's not my pistol," said Horace, catching sight of it; "mine was much larger; that was the one the fellow fired at me—the ball must have gone thro' my hat; I know it again."

Half a dozen eager hands seized upon the hat, and double that number of eager eyes searched for the shot-hole.

"Please, sir," said the ostler again, "this here pist'l is a crockery-ware pist'l—he's full o' brandy and water, he is; and he arnt got no powder at all in un, he arnt."

We scarcely need say this pistol was the property of Mr. Thomas Racquet, and had been dropt in the gig during the scuffle. Everybody smiled, except Horace, who, however persisted in having been shot at, and therefore accompanied Mr. Sniffit to his Worship the Mayor. Here again the tale received additions and improvements, until Mr. Sniffit hardly knew it again ; and there was a deal of consultation and cogitation, the result of which was that Mr. Horace Chuck returned to London, and his Worship the Mayor and Mr. Sniffit went to bed.

CHAPTER XV.

ROBBERY—(PROFESSIONAL).

GREAT was the glee of the allied plunderers, upon the success of their undertaking. The cloaks and masks were stowed away again in the pockets and hats of the two Rattletons in no time, to be by them consigned to the fiery recesses of an adjacent brick kiln, and the pocket-book and pistol—the trophies of victory—these two gentlemen undertook to convey back to Horace's counting-house by nine o'clock the next morning. Tom and his friend Phillpots took the road to Beech End, there to sleep and in the morning separate—the one to London and the other to his Aunts at Coddlethorpe. Tom made inquiry for Tibby Walker, in hopes of recovering his cloak, as he passed through Grimsby, but found no such person ; and then, suddenly missing his pocket-book, he had the satisfaction of finding that he had been robbed as well as hoaxed.

The Messrs. Rattleton walked gaily up the road, directed by the lurid glare of the kiln, chattering merrily over Horace's bravery, and planning the means of returning the captured property to its owner in the most efficacious way,—beating the covers of their brains in hopes of finding a brace of rhymes, stinging and witty, wherewith to accompany it, but none such started, so they went on laughing more than ever at each other's attempts at the mysteries of poesie. They were at the height of their fun, as they passed a little clump of firs, and were looking up at their deep black branches thrown across the clear moonlit sky, when the tables were very unexpectedly and disagreeably turned upon them : three stout tall excavator-looking fellows suddenly stepped out from among the firs, boldly spread themselves across the

road in front, so as completely to stop up the way, and in very significant tones called out "Halves!"

The laughter upon the side of the two Rattletons ceased instantly; a momentary halt however was the only notice taken of this menacing interruption,—and they attempted to pass forward.

"Come, fork out, youngsters. Halves, I say!" exclaimed the spokesman of the party, shouldering Harry Rattleton off the road, while one of his companions did the like good office for his brother Charles.

Harry instantly resented this interference with a blow, and was immediately knocked down for his pains; his brother, who was the coolest of the two, demanded a parley.

"What do you mean by *Halves*?" said he; "if you mean robbery, we have nothing worth your having."

"Hookey! young gentleman—and thank'ee for the news; but we *saw* you just now rob the gentleman in the trap of his pocket-book, and as we were by all the time you see, it is but fair to split the swag: so fork out like Trojans, and let's be off, or we'll save you the trouble—'specially as we meant to have done the business ourselves."

"Robbed him! you rascal," said Harry; "why he's a friend of ours."

"'Nix my dolly!" said the tallest of the fellows, throwing out his leg and putting his finger to his nose.

"Be still, Dick, can't you," said the other fellow. "Now then, *do* you mean to fork out or not? We know all about it, and mean to split if you don't."

"I'll see you hanged first!" said Harry Rattleton.

The words were scarcely out of that gentleman's lips, before a desperate lunge was made by the three fellows, and Mr. Harry Rattleton and his brother found themselves in the ditch, in company with the tall man and the spokesman of the party, rolling over and over, struggling and tearing, kicking up the dust and swallowing it; and vociferating and striking about with all their force. The three fellows easily succeeded, during the scuffle, in getting possession of Horace Chuck's pocket-book and Mr. Rattleton's purse, and then scrambled through the hedge and disappeared; the gentlemen were not long in following them,—but all pursuit was useless, even had they been in plight for it. With torn clothes, and their eyes and mouths full of dust and dirt, did the two brothers look in each other's faces.

"What the devil's to be done now?" said Harry in great dismay; "the book is gone—clean and clever!"

"Gone?" said his companion, with horror in his umquhile merry countenance.

"Gone!" said Mr. Rattleton, conclusively.

"We shall get into some serious mess about this!" said his brother, looking very blank.

There was a long pause; during which each was busy with his own thoughts, in endeavouring to foresee the course of future events in relation to the unlucky termination of their joke.

The two Messieurs Rattleton, after a long confabulation held during their return to the 'Spread Eagle,' came to the conclusion that as the pocket-book *was* destined to have been taken from the person of the owner in real earnest, it mattered not whether it were taken by the regular robbers at once, or whether it first of all passed through their hands, and that the best thing they could do, under the circumstances, would be to say nothing about the loss. How to keep Tom Racquet and Bob Phillpots in the dark, was the only difficulty;—Horace Chuck would be sure to make a great stir and apply to the police;—the only way which occurred to these not over scrupulous young 'gents,' was to protest solemnly that the book and pistol had been duly returned by them and deposited in Horace's counting-house, as originally designed; and so to cause Tom and Bob Phillpots to believe that Horace really had the book, but held it back and made all the fuss in order to compel the actors in the trick to discover themselves, that he might take his revenge upon them by converting what was merely intended for a joke, into an exceedingly disagreeable little bit of earnest.

They could not, however, with all their argument, entirely divest themselves of sundry awkward sensations. Harry loosened his cravat, as if it reminded him unpleasantly of a hempen order of merit occasionally conferred upon gentlemen who were notorious for their exploits upon the road; and his brother inhaled the free breath of the corn fields and wild flowers, and almost fancied it laden with the damp and earthy smell of newly-formed roads across deep Botany Bay forests, gave one of his legs a shake to make sure there was not a thirty-two pound shot chained to the ankle; and cold perspiration stood upon the brows of both, as they found themselves plunged thus unexpectedly within the grasp of the far-reaching talons of the law. They had most decidedly committed a robbery; and however the return of the articles might have palliated the offence—had they been able to have returned them—still the act would have been the same had Horace

Chuck felt inclined to consider the matter as serious; now, however, that the articles were not forthcoming, they had but little doubt, in the event of their being discovered as the first perpetrators of the robbery, that Mr. Horace Chuck—especially if he found that Tom Racquet had anything to do with the transaction—would take upon himself to disbelieve the tale of the second and *real* robbery, and so use the accident to rid himself of a successful rival, and revenge himself for the trick the whole party had played upon him.

“What has become of the pistol?” said Charles Rattleton, all of a sudden.

“I must have dropt it,” said Harry, “during the scuffle; I have not got it now.”

“I hope you did not drop it in the gig, then,” said his brother; “Chuck will be sure to know it again, and then the whole matter is blown.”

This last discovery did not tend to lighten the anxiety which had settled upon the two young gentlemen’s brows, and to-bed they went, gloomy and despondent; the necessity of action however dispelled the fit of the dismals upon the following morning. Breakfast was despatched with all possible speed, Horace Chuck’s horse-pistol was packed up, and a note written, as previously agreed upon, ready for delivery at the counting-house the moment they arrived in town; and they started full of anxiety for the termination of their dangerous frolic.

At nine o’clock, Mr. Charles Rattleton, in an old blouse, delivered into the hands of Sanderson the office messenger an awkward-looking brown paper parcel, directed to *Horace Chuck, Esquire*, and then rejoined his brother. It was then considered politic to advise Tom Racquet of the delivery of the parcel; accordingly a note was addressed to that gentleman by Harry Rattleton, informing him of the return of the pocket-book and pistol to their rightful owner, and congratulating him and themselves upon the success of their enterprise.

Horace Chuck, upon his return to London the morning after his loss, stirred ‘heaven and earth,’ as the poets say—but, in mere prose, stirred the magistrates and the policemen, in order to discover the robbers;—not that we mean to insinuate that there is any thing ‘earthy’ about those true-blue functionaries of the law, unless it be their occasional absorbent qualities, or any thing particularly heavenly in the dispositions of their superiors—the gentlemen of the bench, unless it be the merciful consideration with which they occasionally treat some poor half-naked fellow creature starved into crime by sheer

gaunt wolfish hunger, and driven mad by such an accumulated force of calamity and wretchedness that no human strength could withstand ; —however, Horace Chuck moved the magistrates and the policemen, in hopes of finding out the perpetrators of the robbery, and the account he gave of the ferocity and height of his assailants, and their curious disguises of long black cloaks and masks, puzzled the authorities immensely,—the more especially the latter.

Serjeant Dummy sucked the end of his new staff, and pondered ; while the men of his division—thinking perhaps it was the best thing to do under the circumstances—sucked the ends of their new staves likewise, and pondered also ; bills, however, were printed and sent to all the station houses, and the men, according to order, kept a bright look-out for all tall men in black cloaks and masks,—but, we are sorry to say, without effect. Number ‘102’ of the “*Hen*” division, as he styled himself,—but whether from his peculiarly attaching himself to the interests of the fair sex seems problematical,—however, gave great proof of his activity and discernment, by capturing a tall gentleman in a long cloak coming down Chancery Lane, with a wig on his head ; but nothing came of it, except a “rowing” to Number ‘102,’ and an injunction never to mistake a lawyer for a rogue any more.

Upon Horace Chuck’s return to the counting-house, after having been all the morning closeted with the magistrate and Serjeant Dummy, the brown paper parcel was handed to him by old Sanderson. Horace retired into his private room, and mechanically opened it, and so completely were his thoughts with his absent property that he almost rolled the heavy contents upon his toes before he was aware of them.

A pistol !—his own captured pistol—and a small note, clattered out upon the table.

Horace stood for some minutes as if he had been mesmerized, with the brown paper envelope suspended by one corner, just as he had shaken the contents out upon the table. With eyes starting from their sockets, and teeth close set, and trembling hands, did Horace examine the pistol ; it was his own—there was no doubt about it—loaded ?—no, the charge had been drawn. He shook the paper, as if expecting to find something more ; examined every inch of its surface, in hopes to discover some clue to its history ; and lastly sat down in his chair, and opened the note in as great a state of trepidation as if he had shaken forty thieves out of the parcel instead of an antiquated piece of iron.

The note merely contained a few ironical compliments, congratulating Horace Chuck upon the extent of courage shown during the

robbery, and begging his acceptance of his pocket-book and pistol back again, as tokens of esteem from the robbers,—the whole however couched in such terms as left him no room to doubt but that the whole affair was intended as a trick. Horace looked for his pocket-book, according to the contents of the note, and called in and questioned Old Sanderson; but no intelligence could be gained from him, further than that the parcel had been left by a gentleman in the morning.

All of a sudden Horace thought that he remembered seeing at Tom Racquet's lodgings in Jermyn Street just such a stone-ware pistol as that which the robbers had inadvertently dropt in his gig.

Horace posted off, as soon as this thought struck him, to Jermyn Street.

Mr. Racquet was not at home. "Left for Coddlethorpe, yesterday," said Mrs. Martin's maiden of all-work.

"I just want to take the size of that curious pistol of his that lies upon the mantel-piece up stairs," said Horace.

"He took it with him, sir," said the maiden.

"Sure of that?" said Horace.

"Quite certain, sir; he came back and put it in his pocket whilst I was cleaning his room."

Horace departed with this intelligence, nibbling his thumb-nail and plotting mischief against the peace and happiness of Tom Racquet, his life and liberty.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TOWN OF WELDETON, AND THE WREN'S NEST MINE.

Mr. ERASMUS WHITTLEBURY and his fair daughter took their departure from Stamford Hill, as related in the twelfth chapter of these meant-to-be-interesting memoirs, and arrived at their destination—the fashionable town of Welderton in Westmoreland, without let or hindrance.

Now Welderton was none of your common place, bustling, dingy, old, narrow-streeted, market-place kind of towns, with the fronts of the houses all intersected with huge beams of blackened timber, and the windows all latticed, and containing one or two antique square-towered churches, with great east windows reaching down to the ground, full of tracery, jostled up by themselves in out-of-the-way corners—but nevertheless held very sacred, for all that, and old crosses, and such like old fashioned matters; Welderton was none of these "slow"

places where son had succeeded father, generation after generation, until the very painters and house decorators had fled in dismay at having no new names to paint over the shops,—but a very different kind of a place entirely, a town of much more pretension and far greater ambition :—it had been founded by one John Welder, Esq., an alderman of the City of London, in the year 1702, as the modest inscription upon the town-house did signify, and had increased and multiplied most favourably ever since; and not only had John Welder, Esq., founded the town, but he had also, in addition, made it a present of a pump and a church, with a sharp spire to it, as the modest inscriptions upon *them* did signify; and had also caused to be made or planted a shady walk just outside of the town, stretching down to the shore of the beautiful lake, as a modest inscription upon an obelisk at the end of the said walk did also signify;—and thus came it by its name, Welder-town or Welderton, in gratitude to its projector, who, with his brother-in-law, a Doctor Antony Chouse, who discovered the wonderfully sanative properties of the adjacent spring, made their fortunes by the speculation, and retired to Italy to spend them.

Almost all the houses in Welderton were painted of a delicate cream colour, and had green “jalousies” and shutters and area railings; there was one, however, a striking exception to the general rule, the “Villa” inhabited by Mr. Blobb, the retired butcher, the railings in front of which startled the pedestrian as he approached them by their bright vermilion tint; puzzled him as he arrived directly opposite, by suddenly showing him a white face; and lastly utterly dumbfounded him—when having passed them, he turned his head to make certain of their colour, he discovered they were of a brilliant yellow. Mr. Blobb was a wag, and had thus facetiously painted the three sides of his railings of three different colours.

All the shopkeepers in Welderton sported plate-glass shop-fronts with brass sashes, and made “dreadful sacrifices” and “alarming reductions,” to their fellow tradesmen, in happy emulation of their London brethren; and became bankrupts, and kept one-horse chaises, and paid ten-pences in the pound, and made their fortunes in right splendid and spirited style. All the lawyers were uncommonly fat, and so were the methodist parsons. All the doctors were looking chubby and contented, and so were the undertakers.

It was a most genteel, elegant, and hospitable place, to be sure! You could not pass a house without seeing an invitation to take up your residence within its walls staring you in the face: “Apartments

for a Single Gentleman;" or, if you were a family man, "Genteel Accommodation for a Family," met you at every turn. But "Lodgings to Let"—of course there were no lodgings to let—"Lodgings to Let" was far too brief a sentence to be by any manner of means polite, genteel, or elegant, in any of the various senses in which these terms could be brought to comprehend.

Welderton was an assize town too—and oh! to see the judges going to the Town Hall in "neat flies," and drawn by Billy Chizzlenag's old blind mare, and the kicking brown horse, and preceded by the eight javelin men, all in green baize coats, with red cuffs and collars and cocked hats.

Solemnly, down the High Street, with majestic pace and slow, would wend the imposing procession, the judges' faces bursting out from their frizzy wigs in awful majesty, and their eyes flashing retribution to the evil doer as they went. Of the effect produced upon the townspeople by the eight javelin men in the green baize coats with the red cuffs and collars, and the cocked hats, we will say nothing. "Familiarity breeds contempt," says an old school copybook—not that we mean even to whisper that these majestic adjuncts of justice were not properly appreciated—only one of them being a townsman, and by the perversity of his wretch of a star, under the necessity of keeping an 'emporium' for feline sustenance, and being also in the habit of getting occasionally most immortally and uproariously tipsy, and also requiring to be carried home, by consequence thereof, in a wheelbarrow, wrong side uppermost, familiarized the people perhaps a little too much with the awful majesty of the law, and thereby caused them to joke with its officers in that very free and easy style so popular among her Majesty's lieges when in good temper; nevertheless, as we said before, we do not mean to insinuate but that this scion of justice was treated by his admiring fellow-townsmen with all the respect which his exalted situation required; nor do we mean to insinuate that the cry of "Cats' Meat," with which the procession would be occasionally saluted, was in any way intended as a slight, either upon Billy Chizzlenag's cattle or the judges themselves; we merely meant to say that, perhaps, seeing as it were justice occasionally *en deshabilité* in the person of their tipsy officer, the good people of Welderton—the little boys in particular—were not perhaps quite so much awed by the majesty of the procession as under other circumstances they might be.

Such a polite and genteel place as Welderton could not, of course, be inhabited by any but highly polite and genteel people; and among

the most polite and genteel, or, perhaps we may go so far as to say, that *the* most polite and genteel person in the whole town was Mrs. Shrinkinwood, the carpenter and builder's wife; magnificent in the extreme was the white muff, and the deep white fur border of the pelisse, and the large white tippet, with little kittens' tails with black tips hanging out of them all, with which Mrs. Shrinkinwood would adorn herself upon high-days and holidays; long and graceful ~~was~~ the feather pendant from her bonnet; and manslaughtering in the extreme were the curtailed proportions of that piquant little article itself. Mrs. Shrinkinwood's nose—a fine specimen of the Roman—could be seen in all its fair protuberance, at least the tip of it, from either side of her bonnet, without troubling her to turn her head.

In addition to all these charms, natural and adopted, Mrs. Shrinkinwood had latterly set up one of those little roundabout whitey-brown coloured, black-muzzled dogs, called "pugs," which she always carried before her in her walks—when she did walk—sitting upon her muff; and had tied by a blue ribbon to the cushion of the chaise when she rode—for Mrs. Shrinkinwood kept a chaise, and a horse also—the horse was a tall horse, and used by Mr. S. in his business. There was one little drawback, however, upon the appearance of this elegant turn out. When Mrs. Shrinkinwood purchased the chaise,—which she did, to surprise her husband upon his last birth-day,—she forgot the height of the quadruped which was to have the felicity of drawing it; the shafts of the chaise therefore were thrown up in such a style when old Dobbin was between them, that the vehicle had more the appearance of a wheelbarrow upon an improved principle than a gentleman's carriage; but vanity, like love, is as blind as a bat, and twice as pig-headed. Mrs. Shrinkinwood cared little about the misfit. She had set up her carriage, and if the shafts did "cock up" a little it was nothing when you were used to it.

At the house of this lady of taste and distinction did Mr. Whittlebury and his fair daughter take up their abode, and from her did Caroline, before she had been there twelve hours, hear all the news of the neighbourhood, all the various rumours of the "strike" among the miners, all the ghost-stories of the mine, all the little private histories of all the great people in the place, and a great deal of other information peculiar to Mrs. Shrinkinwood herself.

As to Mr. Whittlebury, he soon became absorbed in the business of reconciling the miners, a task which, with all his good nature, he found much more difficult than he had anticipated; a querulous discon-

tented spirit was abroad among them, and every thing which he proposed was carped at and questioned by the leaders in a way which plainly showed that a termination of the dispute was for the present totally out of the question.

He had to listen to harangues in which were strangely jumbled "fair day's wage for a fair day's work," "corn laws," "free trade," and "effects of machinery;" he had to receive delegates, and submit to all sorts of dictation as to the management of his own property; and was expected to keep his temper under all sorts of offensive hints of violence, in case certain demands were not complied with.

In vain did the old gentleman try to conciliate the leaders; in vain did he point out to them that he had nothing to do with corn laws, free trade, and machinery,—and that the only question between them was, that as he happened to be the owner of the mine, whether he had not at least the power of employing whom he liked at what price he chose; if they did not like the work, so be it—the pay was enough, and would be thankfully received by others, if declined by themselves. But the leaders were men not to be conciliated in such a hurry; they were in correspondence with others of the same way of thinking as themselves, and finding that their places as heads of their "turn-outs" were both pleasant and profitable, determined to stick to them to the last.

Mr. Whittlebury was both annoyed and grieved, to find the leaders of the party so hostile to all reasonable terms,—the more so, as the men, when questioned alone, generally expressed themselves contented, both with their work and their pay; but at the same time said that they left every thing in the hands of their delegates, and that they dared not return to work until the strike was declared over.

And thus the Works, as the mine was termed, were deserted by all the hands but two:—"Red Bill," as he was called among his comrades, and his mate, Scrabbes. These two individuals, although they struck work at the same time as their fellows, still remained at their posts—they had built for themselves a rough sort of habitation at the bottom of the mine, by erecting a kind of wall of loose stones across an angle formed by two jutting rocks.

Red Bill, for he was known by no other name, was a tall powerful ill-looking fellow, with a rough head of dark red hair, cropt short, and whiskers and beard joining in one huge ragged fringe round his face; sulky, surly, and savage in disposition—his fellow miners avoided him; silent and stealthy in his habits—his fellow miners feared him.

He had been born and brought up in the mine, and had spent the whole of his time in its darksome recesses, except a term of about seven years, during which he had enlisted for a soldier—how he had gained his discharge he never told. He returned to the old haunt after his military ardour had evaporated, and was once again enrolled among his old companions, bringing with him the man he called Scrabbes, who followed him like a dog, and seemed attached to him in spite of his evil temper and savage disposition.

Scrabbes was of totally a different character: he was timid and slinking in the extreme, and seemed conscience-stricken—often looking behind him, as if in expectation of being followed by some thing he held in extreme dread—frequently wringing his thin horny hands and uttering strange sounds. His face, which was thin and haggard, and which was rendered more so by the loss of three of his front teeth, kicked out by his friend Red Bill in a drunken brawl, was the very picture of abject slinking cowardice.

And yet, by some unaccountable or secret tie, these two men, of such totally different natures, were constant, nay, inseparable companions. They were seldom seen apart even for a minute. They never visited the daylight, but remained immured within their dreary home—silent, if not contented; and rumours were afloat among their fellow workmen of sights and sounds seen and heard in the vicinity of their habitation, which made the very flesh ‘grew,’ and the hair stand on end.

At the dark and misty extremity of their gloomy abode was a place, from its savage and terrific aspect, called the “Devil’s Maw,” a tremendous chasm in the roof, through which poured the silver day-light in a broad and misty stream. This chasm was ascended by a chain-ladder, reaching from one stage to another, fixed and fitted to the uneven surface of the damp and slimy rock by strong iron pins. This dangerous ascent was never used—it was intended merely as a method of escape, should any accident happen to the machinery at the shaft.

Towards this place early one morning crept, or rather stole, the man Scrabbes, his countenance showing every sign of high nervous excitement—his limbs quivering with fear of detection; onward he went, keeping close under the wall, and scrambling silently behind the huge heaps of refuse which lay in his path until he arrived at the spot where a length of the chain was hanging loosely down over a jutting piece of rock about twelve feet high.

He placed his foot upon the first round of the ladder, and glanced over his shoulder with his usual stealthy and cringing look. He was alone. With sudden and violent energy he climbed quickly to the top of the rock, and then again looked about him: he was still alone. The next stage of the ascent was gained, and the next, until he stood upon a sort of stage, formed by the rock, and covered with old wheels, and pieces of timber. "By G——! I've done him at last!" ejaculated Scrabbes, resting against the side of the rock, breathless, and exhausted by the rapidity with which he had effected his ascent. "Let me once get out of this infernal hole, and I'm a man again."

The whisper had scarcely escaped his lips before the shaggy head of Red Bill appeared upon a level with the platform. He rested his elbows upon the rock, and with a heavy bludgeon upon his shoulder, called out—

"You sneaking hound, you thought you were off, did you?"

Scrabbes started, and made a rush to the next ladder.

"Don't be a fool, Scrabbes," said his companion, gaining the platform, and seizing him by the collar. "We can't part, and you know that well enough; I *can't* trust you, and you *won't* trust me; so let's have no more of this humbug! Get back again."

"I can't go back," said Scrabbes, shivering. "I tell you, Bill, I saw it again last night, as plain as I see you."

"Saw the devil," said Red Bill, angrily. "What are you afraid of, you slinking cur? Get back again, I say."

"I cannot—I cannot," said Scrabbes, wringing his horny hands, while huge drops of perspiration rolled from his forehead.

"If you don't, I'll pitch you headlong down then, and so rid myself of your precious company," said Red Bill, with a ferocious leer. "Get back, I say."

Red Bill administered a kick or two to his trembling companion, and, partly by threats and force, and partly by persuasion, induced him to return to the mine.

Never after this occurrence had the two men been apart for a minute. They slept in the same 'parlour,' as they called the small and wretched apartment which they had built for themselves—worked within a few yards of each other, and watched each other's lips when strangers were by, as if each feared the other would tell of something which his safety required should remain concealed;—a suspicious, fearful, crawling life they led among the dark rocks of that gloomy mine.



THE MINE.

CHAPTER XVII.

TOM LAYS THE FOUNDATION OF A MISFORTUNE, AND CATCHES SIGHT OF HIS MYSTERIOUS VISITER AGAIN.

TOM arrived at Coddlethorpe early upon the following morning, and it being his first visit since his accident, great were the preparations made for his reception. A vague smell of roasting flannel pervaded the whole house; the old well-stuffed easy chair was routed out from the store-room, and well aired for his own particular use; an extra quantity of patent Embden groats, tapioca, sago, and arrowroot were immediately laid up in store for his individual consumption; and several long, moralizing lectures upon the danger of "coaches running away," and young gentlemen running away too, without taking leave of their Aunts, were administered with affectionate solicitation, with other matters equally consolatory to a patient with his arm in a sling.

Tom told of his lost pocket-book, but found little pity for his fresh misfortune. His Aunts, indeed, were sorry—very sorry—for the loss of the notes, but more than hinted that it served Tom right for being so careless, or, in other words, not having eyes in his coat pockets.

It did not escape Tom's notice that there was more than the usual degree of irritability in his dear Aunts' method of calling him to account for his accident, and more than their usual taciturnity in their reception of some of his plans and schemes for amusement. He observed, also, that there was a great deal more talking together secretly in the little parlour than there used to be, and an obvious feeling of being ill at ease when spoken to, as if there was some subject which was not intended for his ears: even Robin walked about as if he was in possession of some news which weighed heavily upon his carrotty brows. Tom also missed the favourite Peggy's attendance at the dinner table; and, altogether, there was an unusual air of mystery pervading the whole household, which perplexed him exceedingly.

At last the truth came out. Peggy—the favourite Peggy—the little girl who had grown up in their service—who had been rescued from the parish workhouse, and educated by the three Misses Racquet—had eloped, and had run away with young Dick Gardner of the 'Fox.'

"It was all through our allowing him to turn that little place into one of those detestable beer-shops," said Aunt Lucy, rubbing her

spectacles very hard with the corner of her apron, and trying to keep down a tear at the fall of her favourite Peggy.

"Has he left the house yet?" inquired Tom.

"No, we cannot get him out of it," replied all three Aunts in a breath. "He has shut up the place and defies us. Oh! he has turned out a sad young rascal. He has almost killed his father, because he took him to task about Peggy, and has been keeping company with none but thieves and vagabonds for a long time past—at least so we have discovered since this unfortunate business—and has converted the 'Fox' into a rendezvous for all the bad characters in the county."

Tom vowed vengeance against the refractory tenant, and protested that he would have him out forthwith; so he sought old Stobbs the broker, who had already been some days armed with the necessary powers, and requested his immediate services. But Mr. Stobbs informed his employer that it was a matter "easier talked about than done," that same said getting possession of a house again, and that he had tried "all manner of games" to effect an entrance, but with no success.

"If a man stole your pus, or your handkercher, or any o' them small chattels," said Mr. Stobbs, with all the gravity of a lawyer, "why you took the law upon him immediate; but when he comes for to steal your house—which, as a body may say, in a manner o' speaking, a man does do wot gets into it, and won't come out any more, and won't pay nothin' while he is there, why it's quite tother—there's nothing but patience is of any use—law won't touch him; a dodge will do sometimes, but not often. When a feller o' that sort once turns housekeeper, he gets so precious cunning, that there's no getting him out without a regular siege of a month, kivering over the tops of the chimney-pots, Epsom-saltzing the water-butt, and all."

"I am determined to have him out, nevertheless," said Tom; "so come along, Mr. Stobbs; we will try a little dodge, as you call it, upon him, and if that fails, we will starve him out."

"Lor' bless you, sir!" said Mr. Stobbs, uncrossing his legs, and brushing the snuff from his black shorts and worsted stockings, "he'll stop in till he eats the cat, he will, if so be she don't come the cannibal over him first. Howsomever, we'll try what we can do."

And so Old Stobbs pulled off his carpet slippers, got off his carpet-covered stool, put on his cap made of carpet, and accompanied Tom to the 'Fox.' On their road, Tom called a little boy from his play, and purchasing the little fellow a ball, made him a present of it, upon con-

dition of his sending it smartly through the parlour-window of the 'Fox:' a feat which the young hero grinned at, and agreed to.

Smash went the glass!—and, as Tom had anticipated, out ran Dick Gardner in a rage, to chastise the culprit, and in walked Mr. Thomas Racquet and Old Stobbs.

It was odd that the destruction of the glass should have had such an effect upon the resident, seeing that he would have cared not a rush if the whole premises had been knocked down by the same ball; but somehow there *is* something peculiarly aggravating in the clatter and smash of a shattered pane of glass. During the moment of its fall, it almost seems as if the noise would never have an end. And thus it was with Mr. Dick Gardner; the exasperating rattle which all of a sudden irritated his ears, and caused him precipitately to withdraw his nose from the recesses of a quart pot, put him into a rage, and threw him from his guard, and the advantages of his four days' siege were all lost in one unguarded minute. The citadel was gained.

"How ain't you, old fellow?" said Dick, putting the best face he could upon his defeat, and following Mr. Stobbs into the house. "Not a bad dodge that."

"Pretty tolerably sober, Mr. Dick; how are you, sir?" replied Mr. Stobbs. "I want the matter of fifteen pound of you, for four quarters' rent, due Lady-day last."

"Nix my dolly!" replied Mr. Gardner; "wish you may get it, old fellow. I want till Christmas to pay it."

"Make the seizure, Stobbs, and waste no more time," said Tom.

Young Dick turned round, and hurled a quart pot at that gentleman's head, by way of preliminary, and then broke out into a torrent of abuse, to all of which, however, Tom remained as insensible as the table against which he leaned.

"You seem pretty cool, you do, my chip," said Mr. Gardner, addressing Tom; "but you'll repent this before long. I'll have my revenge, if I swing for it!" And then Mr. Gardner lowered his voice to a very significant whisper, and said with a sneer, "You haven't been at Beech End lately, my covey, have you?"

Tom started a little at the tone in which this sentence was uttered, as well as at the hint which it seemed to convey.

"Oh! you're on the skewer, are you? You feel queery—rather screwed down—do you? Oh! I thought so! Red about the gills, too!" continued Dick in the same bantering tone of voice; "but I'll sarve you out. You won't get rid of me again in a hurry, I can tell

you, my young shaver!—nor them blessed old cats of Aunts of yours neither. I'll show them a light to go to bed by, some night!"

The young profligate having by this time worked himself into a rage, took his departure from the roof which had sheltered his infancy, and his father's before him, and with a mind bent on revenge, took his way towards London.

Tom at the same time returned to his Aunts, with the news of the expulsion of their disreputable tenant, but could not, for the soul of him, help feeling uneasy at the threats of revenge in which the young ruffian had indulged. The hint about Beech End had an unpleasant effect upon his nerves,—it evidently meant more than met the ear. Suddenly the circumstance of the little archway over the road, and the man's leg in the moonlight, recurred to Tom's thoughts.

"This surely could not have been the individual in hiding at the archway?" said Tom to himself; "I hope not. His participation in our secret will be a little awkward, but the robbery of the farmhouse on the same night, coupled with this young fellow's reputed character, gives it an appearance of likelihood;"—and Tom pondered, and was very serious, to the great delight of his Aunts, who, always upon the watch for what they considered signs of improvement in their volatile Nephew, seized, as usual, upon every wrinkle of his brow, and every dismal shadow which crossed his usually sunshiny countenance, as so many happy omens of increasing gravity of character.

At breakfast time, the next day, Tom received the letter from Mr. Harry Rattleton, containing the lie about the safe delivery of the pocket-book at the office of Mr. Horace Chuck, and a newspaper from an unknown hand, containing an advertisement offering a handsome reward for the recovery thereof and the conviction of the offenders. Tom was sorely puzzled by these counter-statements, and resolved upon an immediate return to London, in order to ascertain the truth. Another note, however, upon the day following, from Mr. Rattleton, in support of the first, again protesting the safe return of the book, and adding that Horace Chuck had hidden the same, in order to take a savage revenge upon the parties who had played him the trick, should he be fortunate enough to discover them, reassured him a little.

Tom felt once more easy, as far as the actual loss of the book was concerned, and, in consequence, enjoyed the advertisement exceedingly, and soon adopted Mr. Rattleton's views of the subject; but the result of the joke, taken altogether, was not quite so pleasant as it might have been. There was something not particularly flattering in being

advertised for in the terms :—"Whereas sundry miscreants, upon the night of Thursday, stopped and robbed a gentleman upon her Majesty's highway of his pocket-book, despite a most gallant resistance," &c. The more especially, as Tom more than suspected that the whole 'robbery and gallant resistance,' was seen by the individual hidden in the little archway, and who would doubtless make the most of his intelligence; and if that same individual were young Dick Gardner, of which his parting words seemed to throw some suspicion, the position which Tom and his companions occupied was far from enviable.

"I *must* get to town, after all," said Tom, "and argue the case with Horace. He surely will not prosecute us all for a mere piece of fun! Who would have thought of the fool taking it so seriously!—his pretence of losing the book, too!—shabby of him—very—but just like him, nevertheless!"

"Tom, my dear! don't stand at that door without your hat," exclaimed Aunt Lucy, all of a sudden;—for Tom, in his ponderings and wanderings, had taken up a position at the garden-door, and was gazing out, abstractedly, upon the lawn.

"Put on your hat, Tom, and beau me down the village, like a good boy. Come. I want to see after poor old Gardner's hurts, and to see Peggy's mother," continued Aunt Lucy.

Tom put on his hat, as desired, and accompanied his Aunt.

They had scarcely been absent a quarter of an hour, before the 'down-Regulator,' to the great surprise of the two stay-at-home Misses Racquet, drew up at the fore-court, and deposited a tall, shabby-looking individual, embellished with a white hat and sandy whiskers, who immediately began fishing over the gate, and poking under the top-rail for the latch, and then running his nose along the wall for the bell-handle. Finding neither, however, he gave the little gate a petulant shake, which, to his surprise opened so promptly (there being no latch), that he stumbled through in somewhat a discomposed manner.

The two ladies, who had been watching him from the parlour-window, were silent with wonder, and felt almost as nervous as if he had broken into the house. Who *could* he be; and what *did* he want? No person of the male species ever called at Coddlethorpe, except the Rev. Mr. Dalton the Rector, and Doctor Gallot, of pharmaceutical notoriety.

The gentleman proceeded to the house-door, waited upon by Lion, who kept sniffing about the calves of his legs in a very unpleasant fashion, as if he were as much puzzled as his mistresses. All of a sud-

den, as if he had made up his mind as to the character of the visiter, 'Lion' backed a few paces, lashed his bushy tail about, displayed his teeth, and barked till the echoes rang again. The stranger did not seem to relish his reception much—peeped at by the ladies from within, and barked at by the great dog from without. He was cool, however, and collected, and waited with exemplary patience the arrival of Robin from the bottom of the garden, whose peculiar province it was, in the absence of poor Peggy, to examine all comers before their admittance to the presence of the ladies.

The stranger sent in his card,—“*Mr. Jeremy Blink, Lyon's Inn,*”—and was immediately ushered into the presence of the Aunts, who stood together, ready to run, scream, or faint, as occasion might arise.

Mr. Blink did at Coddlethorpe precisely as he had done in Jermyn Street—shut the door carefully behind him, took a chair with all the coolness imaginable, and rubbed up the sandy brutus with his fingers. Finding, however, that the ladies remained standing, he very politely begged that they would be seated also.

The Aunts, in some surprise, complied.

“Your names are—Racquet, I believe, ladies?” commenced Mr. Blink.

The two ladies bowed an assent, and requested Mr. Blink to move out of the way of the draft from the crack of the door.

“You have not heard from your brother in India, lately, ladies, have you?” said Mr. Blink, politely.

“Good Heavens! he was killed nineteen or twenty years ago!” exclaimed both ladies together, turning as white as paper, and trembling with excitement at this sudden revival of so melancholy a subject.

“He left no children, I believe?” said the sandy stranger, totally unmoved by the distress of the ladies.

“Dear me, Emily, what shall we do?” said Aunt Cecily, addressing her sister; and then, as suddenly recollecting herself, answered the stranger's question.

“Children?—Yes! that is—one.”

“His wife died in England, I believe?” said the stranger.

“Dear me, Emily! No, sir, in India! May I ask, sir, why you put so many painful questions to us?”

“For your own advantage, ladies!” said the stranger. “I am a man of business.”

“Dear me! where's Tom?” exclaimed Aunt Cecily. “The son of our deeply lamented brother is with us at the present moment, sir.



TOM CATCHES SIGHT OF MR BLINK.

If you have anything to communicate, you had better, perhaps, see him, and——”

“Nothing to communicate at present, madam,” returned the stranger, suddenly starting at the mention of Tom’s proximity. “There is my card. You will shortly, I hope, hear of something to your advantage. In the meantime—ah!—ah!—good morning!” The stranger covered over the sandy brutus with his white hat, and precipitately departed, the calves of his legs attended upon, during their progress to the gate, by the snarling countenance of ‘Lion.’

Just as he emerged from the gate, Tom and his Aunt Lucy turned the corner of a little lane, about fifty yards below, on their way home. No sooner did Tom catch sight of the shabby gentleman, than he instantly quitted his Aunt’s arm, and made a violent start forward in pursuit. Aunt Lucy, however, caught him by the coat tails, and, in spite of all his anxious endeavours and struggles to get away, succeeded in detaining him, and carrying him captive into the house, where Emily and Cecily met them, and detailed the curious questions propounded by the inquisitive stranger. “What can he want?—What does he mean?” exclaimed all three in a breath.

Tom could scarcely find patience enough to hear the numberless speculations indulged in by his Aunts relative to the stranger. He informed them of his having been also subjected to a like visit, and also of the false address given by the party, and was in the middle of his account when the ‘up-Regulator’ went by, towards London.

“I must go,” said Tom; “I am determined to find out who he is. There goes the coach! I will watch whether he goes by it, or remains.”

All three of his Aunts immediately threw themselves upon Tom, begging him to do no such thing; but Tom was as obstinate as a mule—and so set off—not, however, without having a silk handkerchief twisted round his neck by Aunt Lucy, and receiving the usual cautions respecting cold from Emily and Cecily.

Tea time approached, but Tom was absent. Tea was delayed for an hour, but Tom did not arrive. Robin was sent into the village in the direction which Tom had taken; and, after about half an hour’s absence—twenty minutes of which were spent with the ostler of the Coddlethorpe Arms, in speculating upon the business of the stranger—he returned with the news, that the stranger had got into the coach which was changing horses at the time, and had rode away towards London; and that Mr. Racquet had mounted a horse, and had rode after him like mad; and that was all they knew about the matter.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TOM'S CHASE AFTER MR. BLINK.

WHEN Tom reached the inn yard, the coach had started some ten minutes. He asked if he could have a saddle horse, and so overtake it at the end of the next stage. Boots thought he could—ostler thought he might—waiter said he would inquire—host said he could not.

"What! not a saddle-horse in the stable?" said Tom in surprise.

"No," said mine host very coolly. "All out."

"There's the old wall-eyed poster," said the ostler; "but he's sich a cruel hard trotter, and sich a rigler wicked old beast into the bargain."

"Saddle him! saddle him!" almost shouted Tom. "Anything with four legs will do; I'll get something out of him besides wickedness."

The ostler looked at his master—his master smiled consent; so the ostler ran up the yard, and soon returned with the animal in question, which Tom immediately mounted, borrowing a persuader, in the shape of a stout ash stick, from the waiter, and set forward helter-skelter upon his journey.

No sooner was Tom fairly clear of the village, than he put the 'old wall-eyed poster' to his mettle, in hopes of catching the coach at the next stage; but all Tom's endeavours could not insure unanimity of action in the animal's legs. When he trotted, which he persisted in doing as much as he could, he only trotted with his fore-legs—the hinder ones as it were following in a canter. Tom soon got into a rage with the beast—there was no getting a gallop out of him any how. Tom laid into him till his arm ached, and was just going to give it up as impracticable, when he came up with a waggon. The waggoner, seeing how matters stood between the horse and his rider, gave the former a smart cut with his long whip; this being entirely unexpected upon the part of the 'old poster,' he lashed out, and set off at a tolerable pace; and, after one or two demurs, kicks and flings, an occasional shy, and a bolt or two, Tom caught sight of the dust raised by the coach as it ascended a hill about four miles before him.

Luckily for Tom the coach had been detained a little. There had been three lady passengers to take up at the end of a green lane, and each lady was accompanied by the usual complement of trunks, band-boxes, small parcels, and parasols, and also was nervously solicitous

about the well-being of the said trunks and band-boxes;—insisting upon this not being squeezed, and that not being put wrongside uppermost, and the other not being sat upon;—so that altogether, between the packing up of the ladies, and the packing in of all their little articles, about ten minutes had been consumed.

A little more resolute galloping upon the part of the 'wall-eyed poster,' and Tom was as nearly up with the coach as he intended to be; so he trotted on in the rear, smoking with the heat of his ride, and choking with the dust kicked up by the coach.

When the coach drew up to change horses, Tom dismounted at the inn a few yards down the street, determined not to be seen if he could help it by Mr. Blink, gave his panting steed to the ostler, and walked quietly to the coach, and scrambled upon the roof thereof, having made sure that the white hat, with Mr. Blink's head within it, was still snugly ensconced in the inside. He quietly congratulated himself upon being so well upon that gentleman's trail, and firmly determined not to leave it until he had housed him, or found some clue to his strange behaviour. Onward rolled the coach, until it reached the 'Peacock' at Islington, when Mr. Blink immediately jumped out, without, as it appeared, seeing Mr. Racquet, got into a cab, and away the cab rattled.

Tom got off, and hired a cab also, directing the driver to follow the other wherever it went.

Away went the two vehicles, bumping down the then ill-paved Goswell Street into Smithfield, driving the cows one way and the men another (for it was market-day), getting blocked up among flocks of sheep; and running over two or three by way of warning to the others, and then getting clear again only to be once more stopped and halloed after—the drivers lashing, the cattle drovers swearing and poking the 'meat' about, and the 'meat' itself, according to its various temperaments, either standing mooningly still to be run over, or the porcine part most especially scampering clumsily away down all sorts of blind alleys, and screaming lustily.

It was evident that the first cab felt himself chased, for he went down Snow Hill at a topping pace; the horse, by continually making a pair of compasses of his fore legs, and letting his hinder ones take care of themselves, saving himself from falling on his nose.

Up Holborn Hill they went one after the other, performing all those evolutions for which cabs are so famous, until they came to a "block," as a stoppage is technically termed, when the first cabman flourished his whip over his head as a signal to the next, who, in his

turn, did the like, indicating thereby to all who might be following, that they did not want to have their backs scratched, and all was at a stand still—Mr. Blink's cabman turning over his shoulder and exchanging winks with Mr. Racquet's cabman.

The block or stoppage, after having endured some quarter of an hour, was at last satisfactorily removed by flogging some of the horses, almost pulling the jaws off others, and, by backing a few within an inch of the shop fronts, to the infinite terror of their worthy proprietors, and running the pole of an omnibus through the back of a gentleman's carriage to the imminent risk of the footman's calves, and, by the usual shouting and swearing and rude wit of the drivers, contrasting finely with the calm and dignified deportment of the police as they (two of them) marched majestically about among the tangled throng of carriages, and flourished their truncheons, and hit this horse smartly upon the nose, and the other authoritatively upon the rump, and ordered and counter-ordered the coachmen until they growled again with indignation. The mob of vehicles was at last, however, free and in motion, and the two policemen stood serenely and modestly on the curb, like philosophers, admiring the result of their own good works, while a little boy picked a gentleman's pocket close under their noses.

Away went our two cabs among the rest, a little gently at first, until the horses were warm again, along Holborn, round St. Giles's, up Tottenham Court Road, one on each side of the coach-stand, until they arrived within a few yards of each other at the corner of the New Road.

It was now quite evident to Tom that Mr. Blink had discovered and wished to avoid him, for that gentleman got out, popped a letter into the post, and calling a fresh cab set off again immediately down the New Road, in an easterly direction, as rapidly as before.

"I'll find out who he is," said Tom to himself, "if I follow him all day: people do not give false addresses for nothing." So he also changed his cab, and rattled away in the same direction.

The chase was kept up with spirit for some time. Whitechapel Church saw them pass, and the East India Docks were conscious of their presence—London Bridge—the Borough Market—Meux's Brewery—Bankside—Blackfriars Bridge—Fleet Street—Temple Bar: here there was a stop again, in consequence of a country waggon, piled about six inches too high, having stuck fast under the bar.

Tom's attention was for a moment taken up with the string of struggling and floundering horses harnessed to the back of the waggon, in order to get it out again, and Mr. Blink jumped out of the cab

and dived into the mob. Tom however was informed by his driver in an instant and dived after him. Mr. Blink had forgotten that he wore a white hat: Tom, guided by this signal of his presence, soon discovered him. Mr. Blink walked rapidly onward, neither looking to the right nor to the left, with Tom at his heels.

Still onward went Mr. Blink, past the 'New Church' on the right hand side of the way, dropped in for a glass of ale at the 'Edinburgh Castle,' and on again. Suddenly, however, he stopped, considered for a moment, and, with a grin upon his face, turned up Catherine Street, and dived into the pit entrance of Drury Lane Theatre.

Tom followed him, but stopped short at the pay-place.

Tom had but two shillings left in his pocket, and the price of entrance was three. Mr. Blink walked quietly through the swing-door, provokingly calm and collected, and entered the theatre.

Tom tired, angry, and out-manceuvred, walked to his lodgings in Jermyn Street, there to brood over his disappointment and vow vengeance against Mr. Blink, if he could but catch him.

"A pretty wild goose chase I have had of it," said Tom, putting on his slippers. "Confound the fellow, I cannot think what there is about him, and his consummate coolness and impudence, that stirs me so. What the——"

Tom made a pause.

"—— can he want, or what can he mean by all this inquiry. However, I suppose, as the old ladies say, 'Time will show;'" and so, after a little while, Tom dismissed *that* subject from his mind, and took the next which offered. "Gone to the lakes, and with not even the slightest intimation to me that such a journey was projected," said Tom half aloud. "Not kind, to say the least of it; I suppose now that I ought to feel myself inconsolable and miserable beyond redemption; but I will not—I am not of the mettle for such soft-hearted nonsense. If I be a lover, I hope I am a sensible fellow notwithstanding;" and Tom hummed with a very spectral attempt at liveliness—

"If she be not made for me,

What care I how fair she be!"—

and much more to the same wise purpose, all tending to prove that sensible as he considered himself, he was no more proof against the slights and accidents ever attendant upon the tender passion than his illustrious grandfathers and grandmothers.

"Altogether," said Tom, stopping short in the stanza, which he was repeating for the twentieth time, "I think I have either filled my

own hands pretty full of business, or have had them filled for me. Firstly, comes my Aunts' refusal; secondly, comes my unlucky presence, when I should have been absent; thirdly, comes that confounded coolness from 'Papa Whittlebury,' about that ridiculous police business; fourthly, comes this unlucky finale to our trick upon Master Horace; and, lastly, comes that white-hatted individual, with his cool inquiries—so that, altogether, I think I had better set up a clerk or secretary at once to look after my affairs; at any rate, I will see the Rattletons to-morrow, and hear the result of one part of it at least, from their own lips; I do not much like it, these two Rattletons played Bob Phillpots an ugly trick once."

And so Tom fell asleep in his chair, and then suddenly awoke, by very nearly falling out of it. The fatigue he had undergone began to weigh heavily upon him, and the anxiety and uneasiness he felt with regard to the seeming neglect on the part of his lady love, in spite of his philosophy, made him feel chilly and despondent; for Tom was a frank, warm-hearted, good-natured fellow, placing implicit confidence in all around him, and feeling it acutely when any of his more worldly-minded and cooler-headed acquaintance trespassed a little upon his open nature for their own selfish ends, which, to tell the truth, they occasionally did.

"I have been deceived before now," said Tom bitterly; "and that, too, by parties in whom I placed the most unbounded confidence; and I suppose I am to have another lesson in the ways of the world—but I do most sincerely hope not from *that* quarter."

Tom had no sooner concluded the sentence, than he called himself a villain—an ass—a faint-hearted poltroon—a scoundrel—and divers other opprobrious titles, for doubting for an instant the truth and constancy of his heart's choice; and, feeling much relieved by the exercise, he ordered his candle, and proceeded to his repose.

Tom slept soundly amid the many noises which were going on about him, the hum of conversation, as group after group from the theatres and pleasure-parties sought their homes, occasionally bursting into fits of hearty and merry laughter, at the repetition of many a well-told jest and funny story—slept on, through the bitter and piercing scream of some lost-one, dragged, maddened and reeling, from the closing gin-palace,—amid the deep growling and suppressed quarrels of gamblers, as they wended their homeward-way, disputing the last cast of the dice,—amid the sharp rattle of the cab, and the more lumbering sound of the heavily-laden vegetable cart, bound for Covent

Garden market,—the shrill whistle of the boy out for the night, and the loud halloo of some half-drunken sailor, saluting every person he met.

The night hears strange noises, and sees strange scenes. At one and the same moment, the laughter of the living and the groans of the dying,—the whispered plans of cowardly sneaking murder, and the boisterous and hearty revel of him upon whom the foul deed is to be done,—the musical and light-sounding merriment of youthful and hopeful hearts, met together to celebrate some dear-one's birth-day, and the silent and deep sobs of the lorn and despairing mourner, once happy and light-hearted also, but now, alas! cold, weary, alone, and dying, in some rotten and filthy garret—starved, for want of the crumbs which fall unheeded from many a festive board!

At sea, night covers strange sights, and hears sounds, wilder and stranger than on land. The dark deep field of waters is dotted over with ships—some still, some moving, but all alike wending on their honourable course of traffic or of pleasure;—*all*—no, not *all*—there are two or three among that distant crowd—long, low-built, quick-sailing vessels, with their tall masts raking aft, and armed with long guns—which are not upon an honourable course of traffic, although they boast of belonging to the civilized nations of the earth. Hark! from one of them the crew are throwing some of the spoiled cargo into the sea. Lights are at the side, too—and half a dozen faces—merry and laughing faces—watching the splash and eddy caused by the sinking substances. *What* are they throwing thus merrily into the sea? Ask the man who stands so quietly at the helm, eyeing the sharks, and smoking his cigar. He will answer, with a grin, “Heaving the dead slaves overboard!”

There is a flag in that dastardly ship, although not flying at the mast-head, which has certainly *one* true blue corner, covered with stars, upon its field, but the remainder is crossed by blood-red stripes! It is boasted of as the flaunting flag of liberty! *Flaunting* enough, God knows! See! another ship, of a larger and more square build, and upon another sea—a fair, and calm, and moonlight sea—with land just within sight. Lights are at the side there also; and faces—sad faces—glancing in the moonlight! The crew lower something upon a grating, wrapped in sheets, and a flag; and the captain is reading, from a small prayer-book, the service for the burial of the dead! There is a pause—he closes the book! Father, mother, and husband strain their tearful eyes, to catch a last glimpse of all that was once so dear to them! Gradually the grating sinks with its fair and lifeless burthen—reaches the surface of the greedy sea—slowly it is lowered, until

nothing remains in sight—the tackle is slipped, and all is over!—and she, the gentle one, for whom that ship has spread her sails, and has done her utmost to reach a more genial climate, now rests within a few miles of the coveted spot—reached, alas! too late to stay the progress of England's blighting and ever fatal malady.

Truly, night covers strange sights, and hears strange sounds!

Tom slept—the unbroken sleep of the weary! His dreams were, however, disturbed. Thoughts which had several times visited him during his illness, *would* obtrude themselves upon his notice, and *would* be heard; in spite of all his endeavours to put them aside. "Tom," said one,—a grave, but good-tempered old fellow of a Thought, "the last two years of your life have been entirely at your own disposal. How have you spent them?—what have you done with the six thousand and nine hundred and odd hours entrusted to your care, for the well-doing either of yourself or your fellow-creatures? No answer? Well, Tom, I will enumerate for you. You have frightened a few cats—shot a few birds—caught a few fish—ridden a few horses—hunted a few hares and foxes—devoured *not* a few sheep and other animals—been asleep fully one-third of the six thousand and nine hundred and odd hours, and, from anything that can be gathered to the contrary, done little better with the rest. Tom! Tom!" continued this grave old Thought, good-naturedly, "you are a mere schoolboy!"

"So you are! so you are!" whispered Tom's conscience, in a sharp tone, "I have told you so before!" Tom tried, as usual, to smother his conscience—but could not do it; it linked itself, arm in arm, with the grave old Thought, and said again, "I told you so before, but you would not hear me!" And then the grave old Thought passed away, to the mysterious cell from which he came, saying as he went,—“I shall come again, Tom!—I shall come again!—when you least expect me!”

CHAPTER XIX.

CODDLETHORPE.

TOM's Aunts, as soon as he had left them, looked at each other with great anxiety, and finally agreed in admiring his determination, and blaming his precipitancy; in hoping that he would not catch cold, and fearing that he would be thrown from his horse. When, however, night came, and he did not make his appearance, their anxiety became

extreme. Robin was again sent to the Coddlethorpe Arms for news, but returned with no further information. Aunts Emily and Cecily put on their bonnets, and stood at the gate, while 'Lion,' loosed from his kennel for the night, poked his great rough nose into their hands, soliciting notice.

The village street was unlighted, save by the light of the moon and the few and far between gleams which shone from the cottage windows. Old Dolly Stubbs was just shutting-up her cake shop; and the noise of the little shutters, as they were fitted and patted into their places by the active old dame, sounded quite loudly in the silent street, and was echoed back by the opposite houses, and rang again. Dolly Stubbs stood, for a few minutes, holding the door in her hand, and gazing out upon the silent moonlight, and then retired, the clatter of the little bolt, as it shot into its staple, being quite audible. One by one the few lights disappeared; and the half-muddled visitors to the parlour of the Coddlethorpe Arms, walked, or stumbled, or reeled homewards, as the various degrees of sobriety, and the many inequalities of the road enabled them. At last, the public-house lights were extinguished, and the village was at rest.

"Good night, ladies!" said a gentle voice, close beside them.

The Misses Racquet turned, somewhat startled. It was only the clergyman, Mr. Dalton, going home, after visiting poor old Gardner, who was rapidly recovering the effects of his son's brutality.

"Will you not step in, Mr. Dalton?" said both ladies together, for they were anxious, and had become nervous, by standing ruminating in the quiet moonlight; and they were glad to find a friend to whom they could detail their various surmises and distresses.

"Not to-night, thank you, ladies," responded the clergyman. "I should advise you, by-the-by, to let Robin sit up, and also to let 'Lion' have the run of the lawn for a night or two; it seems that Young Gardner has been uttering threats of revenge for your turning him out. He must be somewhere in the neighbourhood, for he has visited Peggy again, and has been trying to induce her to follow him—happily, I am glad to say, without effect."

The two anxious ladies detained their friendly pastor until they had informed him of the sudden flight of their Nephew, and of the visit of the man with the white hat; and they felt much relieved by his expressing an opinion, that the visitor was most likely some fellow who wished to extort money from them, but who was fortunately frightened from his purpose by the mention of Tom's name; and

that Tom, after he had traced the fellow to his hiding hole, would return safe and sound on the following morning.

Once again a friendly "Good night" was interchanged by the ladies and the clergyman, and all prepared to seek their night's repose. 'Lion' was called in from the fore-court, and introduced to the lawn for the night, not, however, before he had indulged in several gambols in the hall, and very nearly brushed the light out of Robin's hand with his bushy tail as he skipped at last through the glass-door, barking and frisking in the moonlight as if he were a fairy, instead of a great heavy fat fellow of a dog.

Aunt Lucy, who was afraid of the night air, met her sisters upon the stairs in her cap, and rather pettishly upbraided them with their want of caution in exposing themselves so unnecessarily: Aunt Lucy had been waiting until her patience was quite exhausted.

"It is such a beautiful night," said the sisters, Emily and Cecily, in extenuation of their fault; "and, besides, we saw Mr. Dalton."

"Why is 'Lion' turned into the lawn?" said Aunt Lucy. "He will knock the tulips all to pieces."

"Young Gardner threatened mischief, it seems," said her sister Emily; "and Mr. Dalton recommended us to do so."

"Dear me!" returned Aunt Lucy, alarmed. "I thought I saw a man just now, as I was looking out of my window, creeping along by the wall of the rick-yard, but I thought it was only fancy."

Robin was called and consulted upon this information immediately, but he did not seem to fear much mischief from "Jolly Dick," as he called the ex-landlord of the 'Fox,' and volunteered, with the assistance of 'Lion,' to insure the ricks and the house against 'Swing' himself.

He had scarcely finished his sentence, before the deep and angry growl of 'Lion,' bursting every now and then into a sudden bark, drew the attention of the whole party to the lawn. A scuffle and a worrying snarl from him the next instant, proclaimed to the anxious Aunts that some stranger and 'Lion' had come to extremities. Suddenly, 'Lion' came trotting into the hall with a piece of red plush in his mouth, being part and parcel of the nether garment of some gentleman, whom he had discovered upon the grounds, and which he deposited, with an anxious countenance and many flourishes of his bushy tail, upon the floor, as a trophy fairly captured from the enemy.

Robin patted 'Lion' on the head, and immediately ran out, jumped over the little wall which divided the lawn from the farming part of

the premises, and proceeded to the rick-yard, but found nothing the matter: all was as silent as moonlight could make it, and all perfectly safe.

Aunts Lucy, Emily, and Cecily,—now thoroughly frightened by this proof of the presence of a stranger upon their grounds at so late a time of the night,—all three united in deploring Tom's absence, and agreeing that he was an exceedingly tiresome young fellow in always being out of the way when he was most wanted; one of them especially thinking to herself that he was also a tiresome young fellow for having been once most materially *in* the way when he was *not* wanted; and all three linked themselves arm in arm, and waited, and listened, and pondered, and whispered, and occasionally shivered as the cool night breeze came sweeping through the two open doors, until Robin returned with 'Lion' at his heels.

Robin immediately, at the urgent command of his mistresses, shu the "nasty door," and then proceeded to allay the alarm which Mr. Dalton's information, coupled with 'Lion's' capture, had originated. He assured them of the safety of the premises, and volunteered to sit up all night and watch until the affair had blown over.

The ladies accepted Robin's proposition, and left him the brandy and an old cloak to keep him from taking cold during his night-watch, and then proceeded to their several rooms, double locking the doors, and peeping out of the windows, and gazing in all directions before composing themselves to sleep.

Robin took the brandy and the cloak, and made himself comfortable in a little out-building, from which he could command a tolerably clear view of the premises; and trusty old 'Lion' picked up the piece of red plush again, and shook it, and pawed and growled over it, and flapped it about his ears most famously, in token of the interest he took in the welfare of his kind mistresses.

The night, to their great relief, passed over in safety. Robin, and his faithful companion, 'Lion,' had not been disturbed in their watch; still, however, the ladies could not entirely divest themselves of certain vague feelings of alarm—fears of they knew not what,—and so they early sought the presence of their friendly visiter of the previous night, and once again told their story of the man in the white hat and 'Lion's' capture of the piece of red plush.

The reverend gentleman could offer them little more advice or consolation than he had done on the previous evening, so gradually led

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them from the subject, until, by degrees, he introduced that of Old Will Gardner, and his unworthy son, and then reverted to the fate of the unhappy Peggy.

"What will you do, ladies? The poor girl must not be thrown upon the world—will you receive her again?" said the clergyman.

At this question a Mrs. Crossedge, an elderly lady from London, who had called on some missionary charity, opened her eyes with astonishment.

"Certainly—most certainly," exclaimed the ladies together. "We never intended to desert her; she ran away from us in the extremity of her fright and grief at our discovery of her—of her——"

"Of her wickedness," interposed Mrs. Crossedge. "I am sure, Miss Racquet, you must be bold indeed, to try such a one again, as your servant has proved herself."

"What will become of her if these ladies do not overlook her misconduct, and once again receive her?" said the clergyman, quietly turning towards the fair missionary.

"I am sure I do not know," replied that lady, somewhat piqued. "She will go to the workhouse, I suppose."

"She will," said the clergyman, warmly; "or perhaps to a prison, and then may God have mercy upon her, for her fellow-creatures will not: once stained with the prison-blot, and she will become the mark for the finger of scorn to point at for ever, although her heart all the while may be weeping the sincerest tears of repentance that ever washed away sin—tears which will ensure her forgiveness from on High, but which will only be mocked at and derided by her jailors and sister felons, and doubted even by those who boast of tender hearts and ready hands to help the innocent; and thus she will live on, until either tempted or starved again into the wrong path, when, indeed, all will be over with her; and she will die, as many have done before her, as utterly depraved as if she had been born in the veriest den that vice and infamy ever framed!"

"She will have her own misdeeds to thank for it," said Mrs. Crossedge, with a toss of her head.

"Excuse me," said Mr. Dalton, "she will have the selfish hard-hearted policy of those who should know better to thank for it; those whose duty it is to save her from herself—whose desire it should be to lure her back to the paths of virtue—but whose purity, forsooth, is so tender, that it becomes tainted by the least sympathy with the de-

serted one, and whose reputation rests upon such unstable grounds, that they are afraid of holding out a helping hand to an erring sister, lest they themselves should suffer by the contact."

"Really, Mr. Dalton," said Mrs. Crossedge, rising, "your remarks are very unpleasant."

"They are not so intended, madam," returned Mr. Dalton. "I merely meant to express my opinion, that the fate of this young woman in her after-life depends very much upon the leniency or severity with which she may be treated in the present instance; and that her mistresses—I make bold so to say, even in their presence—will be answerable for her end, if it turn out wretched and disgraceful, and also will be highly praiseworthy—or, what will be of infinitely more value to their kind and gentle hearts, will reap that reward of good and enviable feeling which is always attendant upon the saving of a fellow-creature from destruction, by overlooking her first step from the path of rectitude."

"Good morning, sir," said Mrs. Crossedge, who had waited with the looks of a martyr for the conclusion of the sentence.

"Good morning, madam," replied Mr. Dalton; and his visiter departed.

"A very excellent creature, Miss Racquet," said Mr. Dalton, addressing Aunt Lucy. "A very excellent creature, Mrs. Crossedge, only I wish she would look a little at home now and then. I should not wish her to relax in her endeavours for the welfare of the Timbuctoo Mission; but there are very many in our own favoured isle, quite as ignorant, and, unhappily, almost as savage as the inhabitants of that far away nation."

Mr. Dalton walked with his three old maiden parishioners as far as their own door, and then proceeded on to inform Peggy that her mistresses were ready to receive her; and, in a few days, the poor girl was once again under the roof which had sheltered her from childhood—tearful and broken-hearted—but silently thankful to the kind hearts which still held their protection over her, in spite of her delinquencies. How different was the bearing of her many friends and acquaintances, and the conduct of *him*, the cause of all her misery and self-reproach. She had approached the Hall by the fields—she could not bear to walk through the village; she scarcely dared, even now, to open the gate; she knew that the usual little knot of gossips were collected round Old Dolly Stubbs' shop-door, and round the bench at the public-house, and she felt that their talk was of *her* and

her worthless lover. The gentle method, however, pursued by her forgiving mistresses, re-assured poor Peggy by degrees, and in a day or two she was able to attend to her domestic duties as before.

Great was the blame laid to the door of the three excellent-hearted old maids of Coddlethorpe by the strict and exemplary Mr. Hashem, a cobbler by trade but a preacher by profession, and the select few who frequented Ebenezer Chapel; much did they say about sitting down with the scorner, and about the sheep which defileth the whole flock, and piously did they curl up their noses at the Rev. Mr. Dalton, and his doctrine of forgiveness to the repentant sinner.

A nine days' wonder in London lasts, we believe, *but* for nine days; but a nine days' wonder in a country-village is limited to no such small space of time—it is a matter of much greater moment; in fact, ninety days will scarcely be found enough to express its lengthened duration—but even ninety days must have an end; and the Dolly Stubbs' tongues, be they never so well hung, will tire at last—thanks to the laws of nature. Long before, however, the nine days' wonder was over, Old Will Gardner was once more able to find his way about, although marked for the remainder of his life by the hand of his reprobate son.

Of Young Dick Gardner himself the village entirely lost sight, and the gossips contented themselves with asserting that he had gone to "Lunnon" to be hanged, or gone with the recruiting party to be a "sodger;" either of which was a happy release to the quiet village of Coddlethorpe.

CHAPTER XX.

MR. CHUCK DINES, AND MEETS WITH AN OLD SCHOOL-FELLOW.

ST. PAUL'S clock made up his mind, one dingy morning, that the time of day was just one hour past meridian, so gave his bell a good sounding thump, by way of announcing the fact to the citizens about him. How he came to be so decided upon a point which had puzzled all the other clocks so intensely, was a mystery only known to such grave machines as himself. Taking into consideration, however, that no sun had been seen for a week previously, the indecision of the smaller clocks, for they were striking at all minutes—between five minutes to, and five minutes after the true time—was in some way excusable; especially as they were almost all of them modest enough to confess

their error, and set themselves right, as soon as they heard the great 'A flat' of their ecclesiastic superior; but there were a few young, newly-built clocks, nevertheless, with brazen faces by day, and flaming faces by night, who seemed to hold opinions of their own, and obstinately and sturdily to insist that the time of day was one hour and a quarter past meridian, and not the one hour only, as falsely set forth by the sun, and his abject follower St. Paul's.

Mr. Horace Chuck, however, was a firm believer in the infallibility of St. Paul's; and therefore when that old cathedral struck one,—which he did rather sulkily that morning, having had his ball and cross in a fog all night,—he compared it with his own watch, and feeling satisfied that it was right, went to dinner.

Now, many people living in a certain genteel part of London called the "West End," have an idea that a citizen's dinner is the most gorgeous and elegantly elaborate banquet possible; that the tables, before the feast begins, groan, as the poet says, under the weight of accumulated turtle and venison, 'aldermen hung in chains,' and other tremendous delicacies, whereas, if there is any groaning at all upon the occasion, it is obvious that it must be occasioned by the aldermen themselves when they groan at the tables after the feast is concluded. There is, it must be confessed, some foundation for this popular error, inasmuch as there are, at certain periods, certain stated and state jolly inflations, by the uninitiated called "Lord Mayors' Dinners," and "Companies' Dinners"—but, Heaven help us! they are no more like a young citizen's ordinary dinner, than the monument is like a toothpick.

Horace Chuck went to his dinner. He sallied forth at the top of his speed, and, with his hands in his pockets, turned into Cornhill, and dived down a little, narrow, corkscrew alley, at the back of the old Royal Exchange, composed of watch and clockmakers, and chop-houses alternately, interspersed with printsellers and hatters.

Into one of the chop-houses of this little alley did Horace make his way, by a vigorous thrust at the cloth-covered swing-door, which flew open with the violence of the blow, and almost annihilated an unwashed waiter, who was rushing past at the moment. This place was evidently divided into more boxes, or pens, than the carpenter ought in his conscience to have found room for; but, nevertheless, the unmerciful vagabond had fixed them all in, somehow and somewhere, greatly to the discomfiture of many of the long-legged race of her Majesty's lieges who were in the diurnal habit of taking sustenance therein.

The ceiling of this region of refreshment was finely clouded with the smoke of years! No innovating whitewash, with the brush of reform, had swept away its original dinginess; and everything about it bore the marks of antiquity, except the waiters, who never stood still long enough to be marked by anything.

Horace Chuck looked about him. Every box was full of the busy and feeding citizens, all, with bended backs and eager eyes, devouring their chops in hungry haste; their knives and forks crossing each other fiercely upon their plates, and clattering, as if to guard them from being prematurely snatched away by the vivid waiters. Nobody here was ever known to have waited longer than three minutes for his chop, or wasted more than ten minutes over it, or sat three minutes after he had despatched it. All was hurry and seeming confusion; it was a mercy the very waiters did not run down one another's throats.

Horace dodged in and out of the restless waiters, and about the room, looking out for a vacant seat, until he saw a gentleman suddenly start up, seize his hat, and make for the door. Horace seated himself immediately.

At his back was the huge fire, piled up and wired over with one immense gridiron, upon which were cooking numberless chops and steaks, superintended by a salamander of a cook, who kept turning them over and over, and handing them to the waiters as they were required. Close to the cook stood a used-up waiter, washing the glasses.

Horace had no sooner taken his seat, than a waiter appeared before him, as suddenly as if he had popped up through a trap in the floor.

"Steak and taters, sir?—yes, sir," said the waiter, placing two plates, covered with round flat tin covers, before him.

"No!" stormed Horace; "don't bring any of your aggravators here—chops!"

'Aggravator' was a term much in vogue by the frequenters of Jolly's, and was conferred upon those pieces of steak the tantalizing dimensions of which rendered one of them not enough for a gentleman's dinner, while two of them were a great deal too much.

"Oh! beg pardon, sir. Pork or mutton, sir?"

"Mutton—underdone!" said Horace, grumbling to himself at the waiter's impudence in trying to palm upon him the destitute 'steak and taters,' which had hung on his hands for the last five minutes.

"Look sharp, Jimmy!" said the waiter to the cook; "there's a reg'lar one o'clock in Number 2, as grumpy as old boots!"

Presently another waiter rushed up with two more tin-covered plates. "Pork chop and peas for you?—yes, sir!" and down went the two plates upon the table, opposite Horace, and away went the waiter.

Horace jumped up, but had scarcely time to turn round to storm at this new mistake, before the plates were snatched from their places by a hungry young gentleman opposite, who adopted them as his lawful property, and commenced a fierce attack upon their contents without apology or delay.

Horace gazed at the young gentleman for a minute, and after waiting the usual time of three minutes, began trying to capture one of the flying waiters, in order to institute inquiries as to the cause of delay in his own case. Just as he had succeeded in catching hold of one, another started up before him.

"Underdone mutton for you, sir, if you please;" said the waiter.

"Yes," said Horace. "Look sharp; pint o' stout."

Down went the plates again, and away went the waiter, and to work went Horace. The chops were hot and splendid, and done to a turn; the potatoes—sweet jewels of the earth—encased in their 'jackets,' like jockies before the start, peeled beautifully, and the 'pint o' stout' was invigorating to the last degree. Horace disposed of them all within the prescribed time, and had just paid his reckoning, when he became conscious of being very much stared at by a shabby-looking individual sitting opposite, just under a peg upon which was hung a dingy white hat. Horace stared in return.

The shabby gentleman, feeling that he was observed, gave his sandy brutus a fierce rough up with both hands, and then went on with peeling a potato.

Horace, having disposed of his dinner, and feeling satisfied at having stared the shabby gentleman down, looked at his watch, put on his hat, (gloves are not worn in the city,) pulled down his waistcoat, and emerged into daylight, and winked and looked about him when he got out, like a man surprised at the purity of the summer air,—as, indeed, he well might be, if he compared it with the heavy, beery, warm, mutton-fat atmosphere he had just left.

"Waiter!" said the shabby gentleman, under the white hat, pouncing so suddenly upon an individual of that profession carrying a tray, as he hurried past, that he was obliged to make a catch at an erratic quart pot; "who is that gentleman just gone out?"

"James, who was that underdone mutton in No. 2?" said the waiter, transferring the question to a passing brother.

"Mr. Whittlebury Chuck," said James, without stopping; "No. 6, Little Clement's Lane; a reg'lar one o'clock."

"I thought I knew him," said the shabby gentleman, as he pulled out his pocket-book, and made a note of the address: he then covered over the sandy brutus with the white hat, paid his reckoning, and departed.

It was afternoon, according to the sun and the city folks, and as the weather was fine, and there was nothing particular to do at the counting-house, Horace thought he would indulge himself, for once in a way, by going home early; so home he went, not to Nelson Square and the domestic attractions of good Mrs. Boblodger, but to Stamford Hill and his own ruminations.

Horace had passed rather an exciting hour or two during the morning, closeted in his little back office, with a tall, swaggering, tipsy, countryman, who had, in addition to a great deal of information respecting the late robbery at Beech End, brought him a small empty pocket-book or note-case, with Mr. Thomas Racquet's name written therein. The countryman had informed Horace Chuck that he had seen the four men in masks and cloaks lurking in the ditch, as he passed with his team, and had had the curiosity, upon his return, to search the place. The empty pocket-book he found among the grass, just where he had seen the men sitting. The countryman had left Horace with a promise to call again the next day, in order to go before the magistrate, and swear to the facts, and receive the reward offered in the bills and advertisements.

"If it be a hoax," thought Horace, "and I can catch the fellows, I'll give 'em a lesson:"—and down went his hands to the bottoms of his coat-tail pockets, and great was the jingling of the halfpence and keys therein confined; and savage was the grin which stretched itself across his flat face, as the thought of a little bit of sweet revenge occurred to his mind.

But the pocket-book—if the affair were a trick, what had become of it? Horace took counsel with himself for a few minutes, and then went over again to the police-office.

Serjeant Dummy stood bolt upright and looked wigs full of wisdom, for Inspector Ridabout, who was in command, had that moment entered, and the Serjeant was a *protégé* of his.

Mr. Chuck stated the particulars of the return of the pistol and the finding the letter, when Inspector Ridabout, who was a very polite gentleman with bushy red whiskers, ordered Serjeant Dummy to make

a note of the circumstance, and after a great deal of talking between them, they decided that a robbery had certainly been committed, but that most likely the robbery "was a lark;"—but it was a robbery to all intents and purposes notwithstanding. They having settled this knotty point to their satisfaction, Inspector Ridabout wished Mr. Chuck good morning, mounted his horse, and departed.

"I should advise you to advertise for the book, sir," said the Serjeant, "'specially as you say it isn't worth having."

"There was luckily nothing in it but papers and memorandums," said Horace.

"Of no use to hanny body but the howner," continued the Serjeant;—"jest so."

Mr. Chuck advertized his missing pocket-book the next morning, duly informing the parties in possession that it was of no use to anybody but the owner, as the Serjeant had advised; but such was the pertinacity or pig-headed stupidity of the thieves, that one of them insisted upon adopting it as his own, and that gentleman's better-half, as if in defiance of the advertisement and in proof of her superior abilities, used the leather covering to patch a hole in the ulterior portion of her young son and heir's corderoy-impossible-to-run-about-withoutables; thus proving that the advertiser laboured under a mistake and was strangely ignorant of the ingenuity of his fellow creatures.

Horace waited a day or two for the arrival of his pocket-book—but of course with disappointment; he was destined never to behold its shining Russia-leather sides again, unless indeed he might by accident catch a sight of them, extended like a spread eagle, as they 'overed' the posts upon the rear of their juvenile possessor.

The more Horace Chuck thought upon his late adventure the more he was inclined to suspect that he had been tricked, and the more he began to push his hands to the bottoms of his coat-tails, and ponder. His reflections at last took a decided turn, and pointed at his acquaintances, Messrs. Rattleton, Racquet, and Phillpots. He was the more inclined to suspect them from the tone with which the two Rattletons had condoled with him upon his loss, and the number of questions they had asked about the height, size, ferocity, and number of the robbers.

In possession of the information furnished by the countryman, who was no other than Young Gardner of Coddlethorpe, and also in possession of the earthenware pistol, which he could almost swear he had seen in Tom's apartments, Horace Chuck had enough to think about

and keep his vengeance warm for some time to come. To Stamford Hill therefore did he go early, in order to ruminate and chew the cud of the sweet and bitter fancies which these combined proofs of Mr. Thomas Racquet's delinquency afforded him.

"I'll prosecute him, as sure as he has got a head," said Horace, thrusting his hands nervously to the very bottoms of his pockets. "I wish I could get hold of some not over particular legal gentleman now;—and yet I don't know, the thing is plain enough—*his* pistol found in my gig—and his pocket-book found on the ground—and my own oath to his identity will do; I don't much like the oath tho', because I am not quite certain—and yet I don't know; and this young clodpole's evidence; I think it will work—I think it will work."

Horace went on muttering to himself and walking down the garden, occasionally stopping to pick up a small spider at the end of a stick, and to drop him into the web of a larger one, and then to watch the battle which ensued, and the inevitable death of the small one; tired of the spiders, he made vicious cuts with his stick at all the butterflies that glittered past him in the sunshine; and then he passed out by the little gate into the meadow at the bottom of the garden, still deep in his schemes of revenge against Tom and his friends the Rattletons.

Horace had met these latter gentlemen often since the eventful evening, partly by chance, and partly by his own seeking; and, in a quiet sneaking kind of manner peculiarly his own, had induced them to talk a great deal upon the subject of the robbery. With all their care, they could not help many little expressions escaping them, which were all gathered up and treasured by Horace as so many indirect proofs of their, at any rate, being privy to the whole transaction. Still, he could not make up his mind to apply for a warrant against Tom and his companions; there was a freezing fear lurking about his heart as to the result of the oath he must take in order to insure their committal—an abject cowering before his own conscience, which a wicked man always feels when about to commit a bad action.

Horace walked, moody and silent, along the uneven green sward of the meadow, occasionally stumbling at an inequality of the ground, and now and then getting his feet almost tied among the dry flowering grass and butter-cups which waved in the sunshine, and lent their fragrance to the evening breeze.

"I can-*not* make up my mind," said Horace, lashing at the grass with his stick, and disturbing one of the cows from her drowsy repose.

Crombie got clumsily up and moved slowly away, followed by her calf. Horace roamed dreamily on, swinging his stick and pondering deeply. He was suddenly startled from his reverie by a voice.

"Ha!—How d'ye do, Horace Chuck? Fine afternoon this!" said a voice over the hedge, which divided the meadow from a little lane.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Horace, taken very much by surprise, and looking up; "I—I do not remember you."

"Possibly not!" said the stranger, taking off a white hat, abstracting a handkerchief therefrom, and wiping his forehead with it. "My name's Blink—Jeremy Blink—Little Jerry, you know, your partner at Old Stone's. Lord, to think how soon a man forgets his school-fellows."

"Ah! how are you?" said Horace in return, making up to the hedge, and then continuing his walk parallel with his old school-fellow. "How are you? Getting on in the world?"

"No! confound it!" said his companion. "I have been slipping and sliding about ever since I left school—can't keep my feet anyhow—no sooner up than I'm down again: thundering greasy world this to walk upon."

"Oh, I don't know," replied Horace; "you should walk steadily."

"You seem to have done pretty well!" said Mr. Blink, pointing to the house; "brought your 'dumps' to a good market at last, eh? Ah! I remember your filching the old window lead from the school-room, and saving up all the little bits of metal you could lay hands upon to make 'dumps' of, and charging enormously for half a dozen. You were an unconscionable dog, Horace."

"You don't remember cheating me out of half a dozen, do you?" replied Horace, with a grin.

"I remember giving you a licking for saying so," said his school-fellow; "but I did *not* cheat you, nevertheless."

Horace and his friend laughed over their school reminiscences, and walked on to the corner of the meadow, pleasantly chatting over the news of the day.

"Here's the gate; come in," said Horace, beginning to unfasten the chain and padlock. "By-the-by, how did you find me out?"

"Saw you at Jolly's this morning at dinner; asked the waiter; got your address in the City; went there; found an old fogie of a porter, who told me you were here. Never mind the gate," replied Mr. Blink, making a leap over the hedge, "here I am!—Prime little meadow this, upon my honour!—two cows and a calf!—pretty little peep

through that door—into the garden, too!—You're a Benedict, of course?"

"I am a bachelor," said Horace, rather sulkily, for the question brought disagreeable reminiscences with it.

"That's right!" said Mr. Blink, giving him a familiar slap on the shoulder.

"You are a bachelor too, then?" said Horace.

"Bachelor!—I believe you!" said Mr. Blink; "A poor devil of a lawyer with a wife! ha! ha! ha!"

"Oh! you're a lawyer, are you?" said Horace, gravely, for he was rather startled at finding a legal gentleman, and one, from what he could remember of him when at school, not likely to be over scrupulous, so ready to his hand, just at the moment he had been wishing for him; it almost seemed, Horace thought, as if *somebody* had heard him.

"Been long in the law?" carelessly observed Horace.

"Why the fact is, between old chums, you know," replied Mr. Blink, lowering his voice; "I do not exactly practise, just now, on my own account—I have a little agency for another—I am a sort of out-o'-door do everything—a legal packhorse—a clerk in fact—but, nevertheless, I can be of use to my friends, when occasion may require."

"Just so!" said Horace musing, and walking on.

"Just the same sort of fellow that you used to be, Chuck; always considering, and looking at your toes! Fifty pounds for your thoughts now—come," said Mr. Blink, in his usual free and easy tone.

"*You* don't seem much altered," said Horace; "bidding more money than you can pay, for things of no use to you, and wanting to meddle with other folks' business."

"Come, come—don't be too hard upon a fellow," said Mr. Blink, "I merely spoke in jest, by way of rousing you from your reverie a little. I'll keep my fifty pounds, and you keep your thoughts."

"To tell the truth, I have a great deal to think about just now," said Horace, walking up to the calf, and beginning to stroke its ears with a very solemn countenance. "You have heard that I have been robbed, I suppose?—(Mr. Blink nodded assent)—Now I very much suspect, or, rather, I am quite certain, that I have been tricked by a parcel of rascally young fellows—acquaintances of mine—very fond of practical jokes. They have returned me the things they took from me,—all, except my pocket book; and I can't make out *why* that has not been returned with the rest; without they have lost it indeed."

"Possibly they have," said Mr. Blink, dropping all at once into his short way of speaking, when upon business. "What are the fellows' names? I'm a man of business; perhaps I can be of use to you."

Horace sidled more in front of the calf, and taking a larger hold upon its soft and flexible ears, drew them through his hands slowly and pleasantly. "The names are of no consequence, just now," said Horace. "There is one fellow, however, I *should* like to trounce, if I could do it decently."

"Possibly so," said Mr. Blink, with an air of intelligence; "and I think you could, too."

Horace commenced pulling the calf's ears more vigorously than ever, and gazed again at Mr. Blink, as much as to say, "Go on."

"You say, or rather the advertisement says, you 'were stopped and robbed.' Well!—you suspect certain parties. Well!—apply for a warrant, and make them prove where they were upon that particular night. Eh! nothing easier than that I should imagine," said Mr. Blink, with the air of a man conscious of having said something clever.

"I've got hold of a country fellow, who says he saw the party just before the robbery, hiding in a ditch; and he has brought me a pocket-book, with one of their names in it, which he found when it was all over, in the place where they were hiding.—('Bravo!' said Mr. Blink.) I have also got a curious earthenware brandy bottle, in the form of a pistol, which one of them dropt in the gig during the scuffle."—('Bravo!' again said Mr. Blink.) Horace stroked away at the devoted calf's ears, until they were almost red-hot with the friction, and proceeded—"So that, altogether, I think if I were inclined to be severe, I could."

"What's his name?" said Mr. Blink, so sharply, that Horace was thrown from the guarded way in which he had hitherto continued the conversation.

"Thomas Racquet!" said Horace, again applying himself strenuously to the calf's ears.

Before Horace had had time to note the surprise beaming in Mr. Blink's countenance at this piece of intelligence, an unlooked-for event befel him.

Crombie, the old brown cow, who had been watching the pair ever since they had entered the meadow, having become at last terribly puzzled as to what they could be doing with her friend's offspring, lowed gently to her drowsy companion, by way of drawing her attention to

what was going on. The maternal cow turned her head to that part of the field where Horace stood, with his legs wide apart, and an ear of the calf in each hand, and with all her parental feelings aroused in an instant by the sight, she made a quiet but desperate rush down upon the devoted ear-comber, flinging up her heels, and lowering her head as she approached. She caught Horace just under the coat-tails, and with one tremendous butt, sent him with the force of a catapult flying clean over the calf's back, and then quietly commenced dressing the ears of her outraged offspring herself.

Mr. Blink, who, like Horace, had his back to the quarter from whence this sudden visitation arrived, started upon seeing his friend take this involuntary flight, and made ready to run; but upon perceiving that there was no danger of attack, stared hard for a minute, and then walked after Horace Chuck, with a curious mixture of surprise, fear, and stifled laughter, playing upon his countenance.

"What the devil was that?" said Horace, sitting up among the long grass, and staring at the calf, the veriest picture of rueful surprise that can well be imagined.

Mr. Blink's laughter burst forth with uncontrollable force, as he shouted rather than answered, "The cow—the cow! lucky she had no horns!—never saw such a '*coup*' in my life!"

Still Horace did not seem at all to see the fun; and it was evident that he rather suspected that he had been made the victim of another practical joke.

"You flew over the calf—ha! ha!—like a—(oh! my sides)—like Astley's best tumbler! Never could have believed it!—what a paragraph for the Sunday papers!—Oh, dear!" continued Mr. Blink, wiping his eyes with his knuckles; "I beg your pardon, Chuck, but I can't help it—you do look so—ha! ha! ha!"

Another explosion of laughter from Mr. Blink sent him bowing and stamping half over the field.

Horace picked himself up from among the long grass unhurt, except in dignity, and looked with no pleasant expression of countenance after his old school-fellow, and then looked at the calf with savage thoughts of veal cutlets, and calf's-foot jelly.

Presently Mr. Blink returned, still laughing immoderately. "I could not help it, 'pon my honour, Chuck, you *did* look so ridiculous; but let's get to business again."

I do not feel at all inclined to 'get to business,' as you call it,

with a fellow who can laugh at such an awful accident as that," said Horace, rubbing himself very hard behind, "and with almost a stranger into the bargain."

"But I can help you, my dear fellow," said Mr. Blink.

"Yes, about as much as you did just now, by laughing in my face, like a d——d fool, as you are," said Horace, whose wrath was rising rapidly, the more so that he thought he saw traces of another explosion hovering about the corners of Mr. Blink's lips.

"No—no! come, don't be so hot," said Mr. Blink. "I tell you I am sorry for having laughed at you."

"I tell you again you are a d——d fool, and a rascal also; and I'll kick you off my grounds, if you don't walk off," said Horace, suddenly bursting out into a raging passion. "Who the devil are *you*, sir, that you should come here and laugh in my face?"

"Gently—gent-ly," said Mr. Blink, elevating his hand with provoking calmness. "'Rascal' is actionable, Mr. Horace Chuck; *scandalum magnatum*, my dear sir; and I'm a man of business."

"And who the devil cares what you are?" said Horace, boiling with passion. "Get off my grounds instantly, or I'll——"

Horace doubled his fist, and made a demonstration of treating his old school-fellow to a pugilistic encounter.

"You'll what?" said Mr. Blink, still as coolly as possible, and looking full into his face. "You do not mean to say that you will strike me, merely because I happened to laugh at your ridiculous adventure with that calf? Pooh, nonsense!" and Mr. Blink turned upon his heel with a sneer.

Horace, who was raving mad with anger, flew at him from behind, clung round his neck viciously with one arm, and punished him pretty severely with the other before he could shake himself free; one tolerably stinging blow, however, from Mr. Jeremy Blink was sufficient to recal Horace Chuck's prudence and to quell his exuberant courage—and the two umquihle friends stood apart, glowing at each other—angry and bleeding from their respective noses.

"Damages, sir, damages!" said Mr. Blink, from behind his hand—"Court of Queen's Bench, sir!—damages!—sault and battery! A man's not to have his head punched for merely laughing at one calf jumping over another."

Horace stood still, astonished at his own deeds of daring, and trembling for the consequences; his courage, never at any time a large

stock, had all been expended in the furious onset, and he now began to think that he had been rather precipitate; his heart beat against his side so rapidly that it almost deprived him of breath; he stood trembling and uncertain, unable to utter a word, either in extenuation of his violence or in further defiance. Mr. Jeremy Blink had therefore all the talk to himself, and very well and very coolly he availed himself of the opportunity, for by the time he had finished his threats of the actions, Horace was in a cold perspiration of anxiety at the long grisly phantoms in the shapes of writs, warrants, bills of costs, counsels' fees, fees of court, and damages, which Mr. Blink kept flourishing before his eyes.

Horace began to feel desirous of making up his quarrel with his late antagonist, but knew not how to commence the reconciliation. Mr. Blink also had found a reason for not wishing to part with his newly found school-fellow too abruptly. Mr. Thomas Racquet's name had dropt out just before the '*fracas*,' and was a charm which bound him for the present to keep the peace, in hopes of making out 'something to his advantage' in that quarter,—besides, with professional shrewdness, he calculated upon turning the 'sault and battery' to account without going to extremities; he remembered the cowardly, passionate, and slinking disposition of his school-antagonist, and calculated that the same influence which held him in awe during those early days, would, if properly administered, lose none of its effects in the present. He therefore resolved to hold the action over him '*in terrorem*,' and get as much as he could out of him that way to begin with.

Horace also remembered the overbearing long-legged school bully in the person of his newly-found acquaintance; and some of his old feelings of awe at his prowess crept coldly round his heart. The whole transaction reminded him so strongly of his boyish days, that he quite expected to be 'pitched into,' and well thrashed, and almost felt inclined to make his usual craving appeal to the Dominie of "Please, sir, here's Blink." In short, the little tussle brought them both back to their school-boy days, and made thorough school-boys of them: the tall tyrannical, not over-particular school 'bully,' and the cringing, timid, vengeful school 'sneak'—and there they stood, the one calculating "when he should have him," and the other watching for an opportunity for a bolt.

CHAPTER XXI.

A TRIP TO THE LAKES.

Now whether old Crombie had become tired of the company of Mr. Jeremy Blink and Mr. Horace Chuck, or whether she had found the soft velvet of her offspring's tender ears so damaged that her maternal feelings overpowered her, is a matter of but little moment. She looked for a minute in the direction of Horace and Mr. Jeremy Blink, and then suddenly flourished her tail in the air, and commenced another furious career down upon them. Horace and his companion however—who had no inclination for a second taste of her prowess—fled, like the wind, towards the little garden door; Horace reached it first,—squeezed through it, banged it to, and locked it, in an instant; leaving Mr. Blink and Crombie to settle anything which might happen to be between them, at their leisure.

Crombie, having put her personal enemy to flight, seemed to consider Mr. Jeremy Blink beneath her notice, and walked briskly away again in the direction of her interesting offspring; leaving him, however, a little nervous and totally out of breath, leaning against the closed gate of the garden.

Horace listened some minutes from the safe side, and finding everything silent, slowly opened the gate and peeped out, to see how matters had been going on. Mr. Blink immediately pushed himself through into the garden, with a cool "Thank you!"—as if he considered that the door had been opened solely for his accommodation.

"I was afraid she'd done for you!" said Horace, in a very agitated tone.

"Thank you!" said Mr. Blink; and then he turned suddenly round upon Horace and said seriously, "Mr. Horace Chuck!—that has passed between us for which one gentleman never forgives another!"

"Oh, nonsense!" said Horace. "Come into the house, and let us talk it over."

"I must have satisfaction!" said Mr. Blink; obstinately keeping his place, cocking the white hat very much on one side, and striking his clenched fist into the palm of the other hand. "I must have satisfaction, Mr. Chuck!"

"Well—well," said Horace—sorely perplexed, between the cool determination of his visiter and the violent trepidation into which his

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race away from Crombie had reduced him—"Well—well; let us go into the house."

Mr. Blink however would not stir: and it was not until Horace had insanely promised him every sort, kind, and description of 'satisfaction,' that he could be prevailed upon to move.

"I tell you what it is, Blink," said Horace, after they had reached the house; "take a glass of wine?—(Mr. Blink nodded)—that's good: so you shall." Horace poured out two glasses, and spilled as much as would have filled another. "I tell you what it is, Blink, I think you can be of service to me in a small matter; and as you say the world has knocked you about a little, I'll see whether I cannot make it up to you. You do not look—you will excuse my saying so—as if you had a very large sum in the Consols."

"Possibly so!" said Mr. Blink, not at all abashed by this compliment to his personal equipment; "the more is the necessity for a little of that 'satisfaction' you promised me just now. I'm a man of business—and never waste time: can you *lend* me ten pounds?"

Horace returned no answer to this sudden '*argumentum ad crumenam*.' Most men are feelingly alive to such an application; but Horace, whose very heart and soul lay among the jingling denizens of that interesting locality, was very much startled at the coolness of the request;—feeling confident, from the tone of voice in which it was preferred, that it was neither more nor less than an absolute 'stand and deliver' sort of a demand.

"Yes," said Horace, after a little consideration, "I can. Take another glass of wine?"

"Cash up, then," said Mr. Blink, in answer; "and I'll give you my 'I. O. U.' and take another glass of wine also."

"Pity you are not in practice yourself," said Horace: "how is it?"

"Want of capital—short of the stumpy," said Mr. Blink, holding up his wine to the light. "Perhaps you could *lend* me five hundred or a thousand, by the by?"

This second appeal put Horace into a worse trepidation than Crombie had done. "Why not exactly," said he; "I might set you upon your legs, perhaps."

"I tell you what it is," said Mr. Blink; "come—if you will set me a-going—if you will only give me enough to pay my admission fee and for my certificate—I'll soon find means to keep on, and will drop this like affair between us about the calf, and give you a good lift in

the business of your friend Thomas Racquet into the bargain. My articles have been out with old Silverwing these two years. He's gone abroad: so I can pitch into his connexion right and left."

"Ha, ha!" said Horace. "You are a sharp chap, Jerry."

"Possibly so!" said that gentleman, filling his glass again uninvited, and reaching across with the decanter to his worthy host. "No more! Well then, tell me all about why you want to 'trounce,' as you call it, this young fellow; and let us get to business at once."

Horace—still full of doubt as to the propriety of trusting his newly-made legal adviser to the fullest extent—hesitated: there was an off-hand easy information-drawing-manner about him that he disliked, and yet could not for the soul of him resist. The consequence was, that Mr. Jeremy Blink, after an afternoon spent over a bottle of sherry and another one of port, was put in possession of the whole history of Mr. Thomas Racquet—his friends and relatives, and also became acquainted with the circumstance of his attentions to the daughter of Mr. Whittlebury,—together with a great deal of other information touching matters connected with the firm of 'Whittlebury and Chuck,'—which, under any other influence than the cool business-like cross-examination adopted by Mr. Blink, would have remained as secret as the grave.

When Mr. Jeremy Blink left Stamford Hill that night, he placed his finger upon the side of his nose and grinned a grin of satisfaction; in a few days afterwards he mounted a new white hat, a new suit of sables, a new card with a new address, and with a new world before him determined, by dint of impudence and roguery, to push his way and make his fortune.

Before Mr. Blink left Horace Chuck, it was decided that the warrant for Tom Racquet's apprehension for the robbery should be deferred for a week,—as he, Mr. Blink, would not have time to attend to the prosecution, having a little business to transact, which he had undertaken for his old friend Silverwing, and which would require his presence in the country for a few days. The warrant was deferred accordingly,

Horace Chuck rubbed his hands with glee as he jumped into bed, after his guest's departure, to dream about his revenge upon Tom, and composed himself to sleep. His dreams however were anything but pleasant: he was flying-the-garter over innumerable calves and Jeremy Blinks the whole night through, and boxing with cows and lawyers, and getting himself cast in enormous damages, and working

so hard, that to wake in the morning, and once again join in the real anxieties and every-day toil of life, was a relief unspeakable.

Poor Tom Racquet! how little he suspected the mine which was digging under his feet: he was happy and contented, and full of his scheme for carrying his Aunt Lucy for a trip to the Lakes,—keeping, of course, the circumstance of his dearly-beloved's presence in that beautiful region discreetly in the back ground.

Upon Tom's return to Coddlethorpe—after his unsuccessful chace after the tormenting Mr. Blink—he proposed his trip to the North, stating as his principal reason, the physician's most urgent advice, that he should have change of air and scene. Not a little to his surprise, his Aunt Lucy immediately fell in with his views, and approved of the scheme, and almost without waiting for his invitation volunteered to accompany him.

Aunt Lucy had a two-fold reason for accepting Tom's proposal: firstly, she wished to introduce him to his father's old friend, Colonel Grey, whose residence lay upon the banks of Windermere; and secondly, she thought it would be a good opportunity of separating him, at any rate for a time, from the fascinating society of Stamford Hill. "Who knows?" argued the old lady with herself, "Colonel Grey has a daughter—a far more eligible match than this Miss Caroline Whittle—Whittle—whatever it is"—and then Aunt Lucy, in spite of herself, sighed and finished the name properly—"Whittlebury"—after in vain trying to cheat herself into believing that she had forgotten it.

There was, however, a great deal to do, and an immense amount of talking to be completed before the day for the departure could be settled. Tom was nearly driven out of his wits by the tremendous preparations for the journey; however, at last, to his infinite satisfaction, everything and every body was gazetted 'Ready,' and the day arrived which was to waft him upon the wings of steam—(in the good old days it was the wings of love)—nearer to the abode of the lady of his affections; but not a word or a hint escaped him respecting the present residence of that young lady and her papa. "The Chapter of Accidents," said Tom to himself, "has a great many funny things to account for, and must e'en take our all meeting together in Westmoreland among the rest."

Aunt Lucy had never been much of a traveller, and was therefore not a little surprised at the coolness with which Tom talked about a few hundred miles, and spoke about passing through Northamptonshire, Warwickshire, Staffordshire, Cheshire, and Lancashire, making no more of them—shires though they be—than a cat scampering over

the pattern of a Brussels carpet. Aunt Lucy was also not a little flurried at Tom's bustling about—flying after the luggage—disputing with the drivers touching the over-charge at the various places where vehicles were necessary before they reached the railway station; and lastly, utterly scandalized at the behaviour of the railway people themselves in violently seizing upon all the moveables, and vanishing with them through a side door before she could turn round, and not a little annoyed at Tom's inattention at the very moment when there seemed to be more than ever a reason for his vigilance. Aunt Lucy tried to follow her cherished handboxes and hair trunks, but was in a very short and decided manner repulsed, and filled with ire and indignation. Tom soon procured the tickets, and taking his Aunt's trembling arm within his, led her through into the station. Her indignation was soon appeased—here in comely order were piled all the vanished moveables. In token of her admiration of his honesty, she offered the guardian porter a sixpence.

"We never *takes* money, mum," said the official, civilly.

Aunt Lucy hesitated, and was returning the sixpence to her purse.

"Sometimes we *do* find a sixpence on the *ground*, mum, when it's dropt," said he of the velveteen, turning half-round to adjust the luggage.

Aunt Lucy, in obedience to the hint, let fall the sixpence—but what became of it, this history knoweth not.

Tom proposed a walk up to the head of the train to examine 'Jupiter,' who had condescended so far as to undertake to drag the train to Birmingham.

Aunt Lucy almost jumped out of her shoes, when 'Jupiter,' having been backed to his place, commenced letting off his steam, and snorting as it were with rage, at finding such a train of mortals waiting to be tacked to his tail. The bell rang, and Tom and his Aunt took their places. Tom all delight, and his Aunt all wonder and amazement, and not a little suspecting that the whole train would be blown to shivers long before it got from under the shed.

Away they went at last at a rattling pace along the open country—through deep cuttings—along the tops of embankments—under viaducts, the sudden echoes of which made Aunt Lucy shrink tightly into her corner—wriggle, wriggle, wriggle; snort, snort, snort; and an occasional jerk or two by way of variety, until they arrived at the first station. Aunt Lucy drew her breath more freely, thanked her fortunate stars that she had not been minced, and looked out of the

window. Tom opened the other door and jumped out, declaring he was hungry; but finding that there was nothing to be had but some half-inch deals, he jumped in again, greatly to the relief of his Aunt, who had no sooner missed him than she became in a very excited and anxious state, imagining all sorts of miseries, from the simple accident of his being left behind to the complicated catastrophe of her having to collect his arms, legs, and head, from five different counties. 'Jupiter,' after taking a drink through a leathern hose, borne by a dingy looking Ganymedes, gave one or two tremendous tugs and snorts, and a most excruciatingly screaming whistle, and drew his tail sluggishly after him again; his attendant, however, gave him a feed of coals and coke, and a tremendous stir up with a long pole, and away he went again as merrily as ever, wriggling and snorting, and throwing off his steam in huge puffs, which hung about the trees, and skimmed along the ground like so many great clouds from some Brobdignag tobacco-pipe. Aunt Lucy began to get accustomed to the rapidity of the motion, and in some measure to feel assured of her corporal safety, so she popped out her head to catch a better view of the country,—but unfortunately just as the up-train, with all its stunning uproar, flashed past them.

Aunt Lucy gave a shrill little scream, withdrew her head with the rapidity of lightning, and almost pinched a piece out of Tom's arm in the extremity of her fright and astonishment.

"A regiment of soldiers going by the up-train," said Tom, in explanation, and rubbing his arm.

"Lor!" said Aunt Lucy, "I thought it was a strip of red tape. I am sure I shall never get on without screaming. I had rather not go any further—suppose it had run against us!"

Tom explained again, and made his Aunt look at the double line of rail; but she withdrew her head again instantly, alarmed more than ever;—the sleepers were all laid bare—there seemed to be nothing to support the carriage but a little slip of iron.

Aunt Lucy however, by degrees, got over this new alarm, and only winked very hard, and shrunk up very much, when they passed the little watch-boxes and small stations; and at last was so far herself as to find amusement in counting the mile-stones as they flew past her, and wondering at the sizes of the cows and other animals grazing in the fields, and totally disbelieving in the width of the old coach roads in the vicinity.

"Here we are," said Tom, "at Scrabattle, fifty miles from Cod-

Althorpe. Now for some luncheon. Here, you guard, what the devil did you lock us in for? Open the door." 'Jupiter' slackened his pace, and the first carriage bumped against him, and the second carriage bumped the first, and the third bumped the second, like a Cambridge boat race,—and then they all stood still.

The guard opened the door, and Tom sprang out and joined the rushing crowd, who were hustling each other, and driving helter skelter to a long covered booth, where five or six lively waiters were waiting, corkscrews in hand, to supply the required refreshments.

Tom knew the value of time too well, at Scranbottle, to stand upon much ceremony with his brother passengers, so pushed, and struggled, and scrambled, with the rest, until he found himself mounted upon a form, and was served with his "Half a pork pie and pint bottle of stout," (with the cork pushed into it,) over the heads of the ravenous multitude around him. Never was there such a scene of devastation: whole batteries of pork pies, sausage rolls, and sandwiches, were demolished before you could wink;—everybody seizing upon that nearest to his hand, and calling lustily for the wherewith to wash it down. The waiters—the whole six of them—rushing hither and thither, almost throwing the pork pies over the heads of the front rank at the unhappy mortals in the back ground,—screwing in and uncorking—pop, pop, pop!—with an energy which if it were to last beyond the customary seven minutes would use them up for ever.

"Here: here's half-a-crown," said Tom, as the bell began to ring for the departure of the train.

"That'll do, sir," said the waiter, seizing hold of it and suddenly diving through a little door.

"My change—my change!" shouted Tom, as the crowd—now as anxious to regain their seats as they were a few minutes before anxious to leave them—rushed past, and almost upset the form upon which he was standing.

No waiter made his appearance.

"My change—my change!" shouted Tom again.

"Now, gentlemen, take your seats!" said the guard; and away ran the two or three remaining stragglers, half choked with the haste with which they swallowed the last mouthful of a pork pie; clang, clang, went the bell; snort, snort, went 'Jupiter;' and the train began to move slowly onwards.

Tom—determined not to be done out of his change—seized upon a

couple of dishes of pastry and fairly bolted away with them, ran down the line, and jumped into the carriage just in time to save his place.

As Tom's carriage moved rapidly past the refreshment room, he held up the two dishes for the edification of the waiter with the short memory and the impaired sense of hearing, and had the satisfaction or seeing that individual immediately recover from both maladies, the instant the escheated property met his eye.

The waiter leaped over the counter—but the train was gone!

"I have been served that trick before at this place," said Tom, in explanation to his fellow-travellers. "They always forget the change,—if you let them; but I've turned the tables for once, at any rate. So Tom divided his capture among his companions; and merrily the Banburies and other confections were eaten, by all but his Aunt Lucy, —who, although she held a biscuit in her hand, could scarcely be prevailed upon to eat it, lest, as we suppose, she should convert herself into a receptacle for stolen goods.

"Why, bless you, Aunt—that is nothing!" said Tom. "I remember coming from Oxford once, when the waiter brought me a glass of brandy-and-water, while we were changing horses;—bitter cold day;—only three minutes allowed to change;—but the rascalion brought it so scalding hot that I could scarcely hold the glass, much less drink the contents; an old trick of John Trot's—he guessed I should be obliged to leave it;—no such thing, when the coach drove off, it drove off glass and all, and coachee and I drank the brandy-and-water upon the road. I never heard of John trying that trick afterwards."

The male passengers grinned and the ladies simpered at Tom's anecdote, and the train rattled on; Tom grew sleepy, and reclined in his comfortable seat; Aunt Lucy adjusted her spectacles, and opened her book; a long line of uninteresting heath, brown, flat and treeless, allowed her uninterrupted leisure for its perusal; page after page of the novel was conned; the interesting lovers were together in a delightful garden,—moonlight—music, love, and flowers,—and the ruf-fian was behind them, with his uplifted stiletto, listening, and ready to put a bloody termination to their tender interview. Aunt Lucy was in a fever of interest and excitement for their fate; she turned the page anxiously, and the train plunged, dashing and roaring, into a long dark tunnel, and all was as black as midnight, save a little lamp, which Aunt Lucy now for the first time discovered was hanging from the roof of the carriage.

Aunt gave a little squeak of surprise, pinched Tom to wake him up, and leaned back in her seat,—fully persuaded she was buried alive in the bowels of the earth.

On went the train, thundering and echoing, on its darksome journey. Presently there appeared at the side of the way a figure holding a white flag, and standing in a sort of semi-circular recess, filled with a dim and a ghostly light; the figure pointed his flag, like Hamlet's father pointing his truncheon, and seemed to say, 'Onward!' and onward they sped, howling more than ever. Again all was dark for some minutes, the atmosphere becoming colder, and the noise more deafening, when they suddenly flashed past another spectre with a white flag, standing in a similar recess, who also waved them onward—still onward.

Aunt Lucy began to tremble, and to fancy that she was in the region of spirits. She spoke to Tom, but the noise of the train was so great that she could not catch his answer. Presently a dim pale blueish light began to find its way into the carriage, and Aunt Lucy had scarcely time to consider what it meant, before the train rushed suddenly into the open and brilliant sunshine.

"Dipsleigh tunnel," said Tom, looking out; "five miles long—cut through Dipsleigh hill."

Aunt spoke not, but looked with startled eyes at her Nephew, regretting in her own mind the change from the old fashioned road which crossed the brow of the hill and gave the traveller the benefit of the free and the bracing air, and the beautiful landscape, for the close noisy unhealthy hole through which she had just been shot, and thought to herself, What will not man sacrifice for gain!

"I wish we were there," said Aunt Lucy, at last. "I am heartily tired of my journey."

Clink, clink, clink—rattle, rattle—thump, went the train, as it gradually turned on to another set of rails inside, to take up a junction train which was waiting for its arrival. As one train ranged up along side of the other, the passengers of each stared out of the windows, and looked with as much surprise at each other as if they had been so many wild animals from some newly-discovered land.

Here there was a deal of hooking and unhooking; rushing about of smart-looking guards, bumping of heavy boxes, running of passengers, ringing of bells, and lastly a backing of the whole train, until the carriage containing Tom and his Aunt became stationary, directly opposite the engine of the other train—a great brass-backed, green-wheeled screaming monster, christened 'Hercules.'

The stunning roar kept up by this brazen giant was enough to deafen a regiment of soldiers. Poor Aunt Lucy, who had been already sufficiently tried, gazed out of the window at the rushing steam, gave herself for lost, resigned herself to her fate, and considered herself blown up beyond all redemption; suddenly 'Hercules' indulged in a shrill whistle, which set every body's teeth on edge—gave one or two tremendous gasps—slowly turned his huge wheels, and gradually moved off to take up his station at the end of the train, and push behind for the remainder of the journey.

The relief of his absence was unspeakable!

Some more running, and bustle, and bell-ringing, and the train was off again, under the combined energies of 'Jupiter' and 'Hercules,' and with the additional satisfaction to the passengers of knowing that if 'Jupiter,' who was in front, should happen to break down, 'Hercules' who was behind, was ready and quite powerful enough to drive the whole train over him in a heap, for his stupidity.

One or two more stoppages, with the same rushing and clatter, and they arrived at the open and handsome station of Birmingham; and from thence proceeded on and on—and on—until they arrived between two high, black, dripping lines of rocky walls.

Here Aunt Lucy perceived many superannuated 'Venuses,' 'Minervas,' 'Mercuries,' and other heathen ladies and gentlemen with corroded wheels and cankered backs, turned out by the rail side to rust—miserable and shrunk they looked by the side of their more modern brethren; old wheels, supernumerary 'sleepers,' as the supporting blocks of wood are called, bundles of rails, piles of cinders, and other dingy 'still life' completed the picture; presently a rope was hooked on to the train, and it was drawn smartly through a dark and yawning archway, spanning from wall to wall, and in a few minutes they immersed into the handsome station of Liverpool.

"Curious classification of the inhabitants of the county of Lancashire," said Tom. "They classed themselves, by the by."

"How mean you?" said his Aunt.

"A Liverpool *gentleman*, a Manchester *man*, a Bury '*blockhead*,' a Bolton *chap*, and a *fellow* from Wigan," replied Tom, with the gravity of a historian.

The guard threw open all the doors; the porters threw down all the luggage, by means of a slide—bandbox first; and before that could be snatched out of the way, down came a trunk, then a carpet bag with a bottle in it, and a heavy 'Imperial' on the top of that.

"Now then," said Tom, having secured his luggage, and handing his Aunt into an omnibus; "the Royal Hotel,"—and away they went.

They had no sooner arrived at that excellent hostelry, than Aunt Lucy, although it was still daylight, insisted that it was bed-time; they had started at ten in the morning, and had travelled more than a hundred miles—and she remembered that it had always become bed-time at the end of such a long journey, and could scarcely be induced to believe that it was just five o'clock, and by consequence dinner-time instead; however, Aunt Lucy, as she said of herself, was the most biddable creature in existence, and one with whom sisters and nephew, and every body else, did just as they pleased;—and so she sat down and enjoyed her dinner.

The next morning saw them again upon the road, and before the sun had brought dinner-time round again, they had entered the town of Welderton, on the banks of the lake of Windermere, that being, according to Tom's disinterested account, the most eligible spot for the recovery of his health and spirits, and also for viewing the beauties of the surrounding scenery. Aunt Lucy was the more satisfied with the locality from its being within a few miles' distance of Colonel Grey's residence; and as they intended to make a stay of some duration in the neighbourhood, proposed to Tom to seek lodgings, and so save the expense of a public hotel; to which, of course, Tom dutifully acquiesced; and so Aunt Lucy, early the next morning, left Tom to his meditations, and sallied forth in search of apartments.

Tom no sooner saw his dear Aunt fairly departed upon her errand, than he set off out of the town in the direction of the Wren's Nest Mine, hoping to find out from some of the work-people about, the address of old Mr. Whittlebury and his fair daughter. Guided by a little ragged urchin, he was not long in discovering the works, which, to his great surprise, instead of wearing an aspect of bustle and business, were totally deserted. The engine house, a tall narrow brick building, with a gigantic iron arm thrust out of its side, was silent and at rest—every thing about seemed to wear an aspect of desolation. Tom wandered through the arched cutting in the upright range of rocks, followed by his ragged guide, but found no one. Here, at the back, the crags had been worked or cut away until they formed a long cathedral-like aisle of arches, open on one side to the foot of a hill, whose precipitate sides closed in all further view of the country, and on the other supported by a wall of solid rock.

Tom's little guide here said something to him, the import of which

he could not understand, so thoroughly Westmoreland was the dialect; all he could catch were some words like "Thur Devil's Mawr!" and the little fellow pointed at the same time to a part of the excavation a little further on. Tom was induced to proceed in the direction, and came all at once at a sudden turn in the rock to the brink of an immense chasm in the ground, fenced by a wall of loose stones about the height of a man's knee. Tom gazed down this tremendous and misty opening with no little wonder, and watched the thin blueish vapours as they floated about between him and the bottom of the chasm. After gazing a little while, he became accustomed to the light, and could plainly distinguish the huge heaps of refuse, and some of the rocky forms, which lay in the hazy depth.

"Thur Devil's Mawr!" said his little guide again, grinning at Tom and stepping over the low stone wall.

Tom drew back with horror and astonishment, at the urchin's temerity, expecting the next minute to hear him dashed to pieces. The little fellow however threw himself coolly over the edge of the chasm, holding on by a stout iron pin, and with his feet upon the first step of the chain ladder—(mentioned some chapters back,) and his head and shoulders just above the level, motioned to Tom to follow him in his descent.

Tom's attention however was diverted, by the sudden appearance of a wrinkled and decayed old dame, whose face somehow seemed familiar to him; she came down the hill-side, on the open part of the works, bearing a tin vessel and a bundle. The old woman came directly to the brink of the chasm, and catching the young urchin by the hair of the head, compelled him to ascend, and then dismissed him with no very gentle words.

She placed the tin vessel and the bundle just within the dwarf wall.

Tom could not help looking at her very intently. "Either my memory plays me an unaccountable trick," said Tom to himself, "or I have seen that face before."

"Is the descent dangerous?" said Tom, by way of opening a conversation, which, for some undefined reason, he felt himself impelled to do with the old woman.

She looked at him for an instant, and said "VERY!" and then turned to depart. There was a something in the tone in which the word was uttered which seemed to imply that there were other dangers to be encountered besides the mere difficulties of the descent. Tom

was perplexed, and followed the old woman, in hopes of getting some further information from her.

"If you must go down—go down to-morrow, at twelve. Others will be there; and the boy shall guide you;" she said at last, in reply to Tom's many interrogatories. But to all his questions, as to why he was to make the descent to-morrow, and at twelve, rather than at the present time, and who the others were to be, the old lady was obdurately silent.

"Well," said Tom, as he saw the old woman cross the brow of the hill, "I like a bit of mystery: I will obey the old dame—come what will of it."

Tom soon after caught sight of his juvenile guide again, and after a little trouble elicited from him, that Mr. Whittlebury and a party of ladies were going down on the morrow, and that the old woman was a fortune-teller by profession and a relative of one of the miners. Her profession at once accounted for her dark hints of hidden dangers, and therefore spoiled all the romance with which Tom had at first been inclined to invest the rencontre, but the other information filled his heart with delight.

Still, however, Tom felt dissatisfied; the more he thought about the old woman, the more he felt certain that he had seen her before; he therefore resolved to pay the old lady a visit, and have his fortune told;—hoping, that during the operation something would turn up which would elucidate the mystery. Guided by his juvenile companion, he crossed the hill in the same direction taken by the old woman a little while before, and after a short walk, entered the lower part of Welderton—the remains of the original village, in fact, from which sprang the present populous and popular town; the streets, or rather lanes, were dirty, narrow, and ruinous, and the inhabitants—principally consisting of the miners and their families—squalid to a degree; the habitation of Old Joan Illfettle was soon found, and Tom, after knocking repeatedly with his stick to no purpose, opened the door and entered;—his little companion giving one peep of curiosity into the wretched dwelling, and then taking to his heels in an agony of fright at the appearance of a black cat—the indispensable companion of all witches, sorcerers, and fortune-tellers, from time immemorial.

"I want my fortune told!" said Tom, appealing to the old woman, who was cooking a herring on the end of a skewer.

The old woman took no notice of Tom for some minutes; suddenly

however she turned round and faced him, stooping forward and whispering in a low husky tone of voice, "Go—take up your lodgings in 29, Hill Street, and your fortune will tell itself in less than a week!"

"But why?" began Tom.

"Go!—and ask no questions. Stay: to show you that I *know* what I am about—there are persons residing there whose safety you would purchase with your heart's blood! Your name begins with R and theirs with W. Tell them—but especially *him*—to mind that the red fox does not sit upon his hearth before the week be past!"

"You know me then!" said Tom, feeling somewhat uncomfortable, and struggling desperately with some few feelings of old-fashioned superstition which all of a sudden sprung up in his heart,—the results of many a seed sown in his infancy.

"I do!" said the old woman; "and let that suffice. Do my bidding at the mine, and at the house, as you already have done it by coming to Westmoreland."

"The devil!" said Tom in astonishment, at this last flight of the old woman's.

Old Joan Illfettle immediately thrust Tom out of the door, and fastened it behind him with much noise and clatter.

"The devil!" said Tom again, when he found himself outside. "I don't understand all this: I must look about me a little. I received no intimation to come to Westmoreland."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE RENCONTRE.

OLD Mr. Whittlebury was at Weldonerton, and Old Mr. Whittlebury was in that state of mind popularly termed "a fidget." There seemed as if there would be no end to the dispute with the miners—no end to the meetings of the delegates—no end to their speeches—no end to Mrs. Shrinkinwood's evening ghost stories—no end to Caroline's mountain rambles—and lastly, no end to the tops of the pens he himself nibbled to destruction, in the uncertainty and perplexity in which he found himself involved.

Visions of a certain fair lady in a straw bonnet, with a white veil and gold spectacles, haunted his sleepless pillow:—one moment gracefully dancing the double shuffle with Teddy Ewbank, a tall athletic

young fellow, an overlooker of the miners; another moment, walking lovingly to Church with some visionary individual,—whose ribs Mr. Whittlebury felt that he could drub very soundly, if he could but get at them.

Mr. Whittlebury could not—as his pensive daughter Caroline did—indulge in long solitary rambles among the wooded crags and leafy recesses of the banks of the lake, and so charm away his melancholy. No sooner was his good-natured face seen in the vicinity of the works, than he was beset with petitions from the wives of the turn-outs, followed by the ragged children, or stopped and argued with by a busy delegate; he therefore kept as much within the house as his situation allowed—preferring Mrs. Shrinkinwood's ghostly gabble to the unceasing annoyance he met with out of doors.

Another matter too annoyed the old gentleman exceedingly: the many good-natured concessions which he wished to make to the refractory miners were not approved of by Mister Horace Chuck; there was in consequence a great deal of writing between the partners;—the elder advocating gentle measures, the younger—constitutionally hot-headed and obstinate—insisting upon coercion.

Mr. Whittlebury's walk therefore—when he did walk—was from one bunch of Kidderminster roses to another, upon Mrs. Shrinkinwood's best carpet, and his views of the beauties of nature were confined to the opposite row of cream-coloured houses—except when occasionally Mrs. Shrinkinwood herself, with her little fat pug dog (balanced upon the muff) would pass the window.

Everybody is aware, either from personal experience or from reading, of the deadly lively look-out at a country-house window, and everybody will therefore commiserate the feelings of poor Mr. Whittlebury:—within stone's-throw of some of the most interesting scenery in the country, and yet, from various causes, confined to the narrow limits of his chamber. He felt dispirited and melancholy in spite of himself. We question much whether our own favourite method of chasing away the 'blues,' when placed in similar circumstances, would have had any effect upon his drooping spirits.

Reader! the next time thy dismal destiny flings thee alone into the empty coffee-room of an inn,—after thou hast caught all the flies, read all the newspapers, badgered the waiter, hunted the chambermaid, growled at the 'Boots,' lectured the landlord, sneered at the wine, and done other acts and deeds all tending to show the loss of thy equanimity of temper,—plant thyself at the window, if there be one, and

watch;—there is a portion in the anatomy of every passer-by which shall repay thee for thy trouble, and call forth thy speculative powers to their uttermost, besides pleasantly titillating thy risible nerves. Every lady and gentleman hath a nose: our advice to thee is—Examine each as it appeareth before thy place of observation. In the multitude of counsellors there is safety—so in the multitude of noses there is amusement.

Firstly comes a dapper little fellow with swinging arms and dancing gait, his hat on one side, and his hands in his pockets, the happy possessor of an ‘aquiline’ of the first quality; how he came by it seems to be a mystery—the rest of his body is evidently built for a ‘snub,’—but nevertheless he has it, and right aristocratically it snuffs the air, and holds less gifted forms in high disdain. This little fellow has a great deal to say for himself upon every topic, whether he understands it or not, and says what he has to say very loudly, and with many emphatic nods of the head and pecks, as it were, with the aquiline feature in question. Following this happy individual will come a damsel, dainty and dangerous, with a very perfection of a nose—no fun—nothing but sentiment and sweet sensibility;—therefore, delicate and beautiful though it be, most strenuously to be forgotten as soon as beheld, lest per chance it maketh an impression not easily obliterated. Next in rotation will appear a chubby-faced individual with a most violent ‘snub,’ and a pair of eyes which have flinched into their respective corners at the very sight of it. Next follows a long-legged solemn hero with a most unmistakable ‘Roman’—an organ like a cheese knife—who looks straight before him, and seems determined to follow ‘his nose’ at all hazards, knowing perhaps, from experience, that he will cut his way through the world the better for it. In short, endless is the variety, and inexhaustible the amusement, of a living chapter of noses. There is only one specimen of the number at which prudence hints that we should shut our eyes and be discreetly silent:—a fine rubicund blossom-covered mulberry promontory, wagging and shaking with every step of its burly and portly owner. Egad! you must not be caught criticising *that* fire-brand proboscis; it will give itself an angry twitch, turn spitefully purple in a minute, shine like a salamander, telegraph its exasperation to its immediate attendants—a pair of half-shut, sharp, red little eyes, who, in their turn, finding their neighbour so irascibly hot, will know directly that somebody is looking at him, and immediately transmit the aggravating intelligence to the fiery fists and the stout walking stick—the never-failing attendants upon

a 'jolly red nose,' and then there is no telling what will be the end of it: fiery fists and stout walking-sticks are not notorious for forbearance when their owners' noses are in an unnatural state of excitement. But, bless us! we have been following other people's noses, and, by consequence thereof, wandering from the path before us. We will, however, now follow our own, and go on with our story.

Among the many sources of uneasiness which grieved Old Mr. Whittlebury, was the now rapid expiration of the time allowed for the miners, either to return to their duties, or to give up the houses which they inhabited, belonging to the firm: another week, and coercive measures would be resorted to—by the ejection of the men from their dwellings, and the installation of others willing to undertake the work at the stipulated price.

Old Mr. Whittlebury had received more than one threatening letter, breathing fire and sword in the event of his persisting in his determination; to none of which had he paid more attention than communicating their contents to the magistrate of the district. Colonel Grey, the old friend of Tom's father, who was the principal magistrate, thought more of these ebullitions of public feeling than Mr. Whittlebury, and quietly prepared for the worst, by having a number of special constables sworn in, and the military at the neighbouring town of Fellborough upon the alert.

In consequence of the many personal interviews, which the disturbed state of the place had rendered necessary, between Mr. Whittlebury and Colonel Grey, an intimacy had sprung up between the daughters of these two gentlemen, which soon ripened into an 'everlasting' friendship. Mary Grey was a young lady of about Caroline's own age, but timid and retiring in her manner to a painful degree; this unhappy feeling was induced by an unfortunate accident in her infancy, which left her marked, and in her own idea, disfigured for life—a long deep, but, to those not aware of its existence, scarcely perceptible scar, crossed one of her fair cheeks, almost from the eye to the ear; the painful thought that this mark rendered her particular, if not disagreeable in the eyes of the world, haunted the poor girl's imagination, and drove her to solitude and study for solace and comfort.

The gentle heart of her newly-found friend, however, soon wiled Mary from her solitary musings, and under her good-natured guidance, and excellent arguments, she at last became a little more reconciled to the world without, greatly to the Colonel's delight. The young ladies, therefore, soon became firm and inseparable friends,—rambling the

mountains together, exploring the rocks, threading the woods, and visiting and relieving the wives of the poorer class of the refractory miners.

Another and a stronger bond of friendship was soon formed between the two young ladies—confidence followed confidence. Caroline put her new friend into possession of all the particulars respecting her attachment to Tom;—the many—many months they had been separated—the promise she had made, and faithfully kept, of not even mentioning his name during her stay in Westmoreland—her hopes of all ending well—and her unalterable determination of never forgetting him;—and received from Mary in return a similar account, wherein a certain Mr. Smythe (not Smith), a lawyer, and according to that young lady's account, a very great bore, figured very ridiculously; and a certain Stephen Ward, at present in India, figured on the contrary, after a very interesting fashion. They had also had their fortunes told together by Joan Illfettle, and among the many dark and mysterious hints then thrown out, there was one which, strangely enough, bound their fates together. Sensible and educated as the two young ladies were, they could not wholly divest themselves of the influence which this strange coincidence held over them.

Mr. Whittlebury was one afternoon, as was his wont, sitting by the fire—for the weather was now getting cold, and the wind blustering and fitful—when his daughter, accompanied by Mary Grey, having concluded some charitable errand to the lower part of the town, returned. Caroline was pale, and trembling violently; and, together with her friend, endeavoured, by tears and entreaties, to induce her papa to give up a visit to the interior of the mine, which had been projected for some days, and to put an end to the contest with the refractory miners.

They had, in the course of their peregrination, seen old Joan Illfettle again, whose hints and mysteries had become darker than ever; but all pointing to the danger of Mr. Whittlebury's remaining in the town after the twelfth day of the month—the day upon which the ejection was to take place. She had also mingled matters of a more personal nature—startling Caroline by telling her of the proximity of her lover, even whispering his name in her ear, and bidding her meet him in the Wren's Nest Mine on the following day.

The old gentleman was firm in his determination not to quit his residence at the threats of the miners, and joked his daughter and her friend so unmercifully upon their fortune-telling adventures, that

they at last recovered their spirits in some degree, and even after dinner essayed a vocal duet; their voices, however, refused their office, and they retired to Caroline's room to talk over their adventure by themselves.

The young ladies had no sooner departed than Mr. Whittlebury walked out with the purpose of gathering, if he could, any information respecting the subject which had affected his daughter so materially; but he could gain nothing but what he was already in possession of, namely, that if he turned the miners out of *their* houses, (as they somewhat preposterously called Mr. Whittlebury's property,) they would turn him out of his.

During the old gentleman's absence, a lady,—with a straw bonnet and a white veil attached, and a pair of gold spectacles on her nose,—tempted by the imposing exterior of the house, and the little card in the window informing all passers-by that “Genteel Apartments” were “to be Let within,” knocked at the door, and inquired for Mrs. Shrinkinwood, the lady of the mansion. That person was not long in presenting herself, attended by her everlasting pug ‘Bobby.’ ‘Bobby’ immediately flew at the visiter’s ancles, and was half throttled as he was dragged, struggling and snarling, away by the blue ribbon. Mrs. Shrinkinwood introduced the lady with the white veil and gold spectacles to the ‘genteel apartments’ which were the objects of the advertisement,—and which, as Mrs. Shrinkinwood said, combined “all the accommodations of a genteel private residence, with the advantages of a first-rate hotel:”—the ‘accommodation’ being the scarcity of the servant whenever she was most wanted, and the ‘advantages’ the similarity in the sum total of the weekly bill.

Aunt Lucy, however—for it was no less a personage—tired with her lodging-hunting, and feeling pleased with the rooms,—after one or two ineffectual attempts to remove Mrs. Shrinkinwood’s dislike to a reduction in her terms,—agreed to become the tenant, and paid the required deposit of two guineas.

“There are no other residents in the house, of course?” said Aunt Lucy.

Mrs. Shrinkinwood did not approve of the “of course” of her new lodger by any means, and so replied, with some asperity, “that there were other residents—a very genteel old gentleman and his daughter—persons as was of consequence in the place—proprietor of the works near the town—great merchant of London. Mr. Orasmus Whittlebury by name and his beautiful and accomplished daughter Caroline—(Mrs.

Skrinkinwood took in the *Morning Post*)—the elegantest young lady she had ever seen, and the toast of the town ever since she had been there."

Aunt Lucy—after the first great start of surprise which the mention of this name had occasioned her—allowed Mrs. Shrinkinwood to run on for some time with her description of her tenants, but in her extreme astonishment scarcely understanding a word the good lady uttered. Aunt Lucy doubted the evidence of her ears, and felt inclined to pinch herself or Mrs. Shrinkinwood, to make sure that she was not in a dream.

"Did you say 'Whittlebury?'" said Aunt Lucy, rising from her chair.

"O-rasmus Whittlebury!" said Mrs. Shrinkinwood, blandly—stroking 'Bobby,' whom she had held under her arm during the whole interview. "O-rasmus Whittlebury, of London."

"You must excuse my altering my mind about this business, Mrs. Shrinkinwood," said Aunt Lucy; "but circumstances—that is—I—I am afraid the house would not exactly suit me just now."

"Oh, certainly, ma'am," replied Mrs. S., drawing herself up and hastily pocketing the two guineas, which she held in her hand; "if 'circumstances' is—as you say—why of course it must be so. But in them cases the deposit is always forfeited:"—and Mrs. S. gave her pocket a sort of accidental tap.

This state of the case did not at all fall in with Aunt Lucy's ideas of propriety; she therefore attempted to argue the matter with the lady, but the more she tried to convince Mrs. Shrinkinwood, the more that lady laid down the law and tapped her pocket, until from quiet argument the two fair disputants gradually rose to a genteel wordy battle—suppressed in its tone certainly, but none the less intense for all that. Aunt Lucy called Mrs. Shrinkinwood a "rogue" and a "cheat," and Mrs. Shrinkinwood in return threw out disrespectful hints upon Aunt Lucy's motives in wanting lodgings already occupied by an elderly single gentleman, and then opened the parlour door, and curtsied her out in a very lofty manner.

Aunt Lucy—boiling with indignation and smarting under Mrs. Shrinkinwood's sarcasms—sailed majestically past that lady and made hastily for the street door, which she was allowed to reach by herself; she threw it widely open, and bounced out into the street, pulling it smartly and spitefully after her. Bang went the door! and, unluckily for poor Aunt Lucy's dignity, she was caught fast by the tail of her

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AUNT FLODY'S DILEMMA

gown—the door had closed upon it, and she was a prisoner; she tried to extricate herself by pulling at her dress—it was too tightly fixed; she applied herself to the knocker—but no one answered! Mrs. Shrinkinwood's head appeared for a moment at the window, and something like a malicious smile was seen upon her face when she perceived the unpleasant predicament of her late customer. No one however answered the door.

Aunt Lucy stood for a minute or two, after playing four startling fantasias upon the knocker, and began to feel somewhat discomposed, in consequence of seeing several windows thrown up in the immediate neighbourhood, and finding several inquisitive pairs of eyes directed upon her and her proceedings; the shopkeepers too on the opposite side of the way came to their doors and looked out, and a little mob of dirty boys began to gather round her and whisper, "Oh, erikay!"—"Here's a go!"—"She's caught by the tail!"—"How rum!" with many other little expressions of delight at her forlorn situation.

Aunt Lucy felt herself getting very red in the face and very hot in her temper, and was upon the point of turning round to borrow a knife, when who should she see coming leisurely down the street, with his eyes also directed with no little curiosity to the door, but Old Mr. Whittlebury himself! Aunty turned hastily round in despair, and gave one tremendous tug at her tail, but the silk was too good to give way,—and Mr. Whittlebury arrived at the door, all smiles, bows, and astonishment.

Aunt Lucy backed against the door, in order to hide her accident—bewildered, angry, and confused; rushing through her mind, with the force of a whirlwind, came a whole torrent of anything but blessings upon Tom's head—for his unpardonable trick in bringing her into the same town with Old Mr. Whittlebury.

The old gentleman bowed again, and wondered exceedingly, in the first place, at seeing the lady at all; in the second place, at seeing her upon the steps of his own door; and thirdly, at the pertinacity with which she seemed inclined to keep possession of the said steps. Rushing through his mind came whole hosts of sixty-year old cupids and antique leap-year jokes, among which latter, he felt timorously inclined to place the very unaccountable presence of Miss Lucy Racquet upon the threshold of his dwelling.

He smiled a smile of welcome and affection upon the chosen of his heart, and held forth his hand as he ascended the steps.

Aunt Lucy, trembling and now thoroughly 'beside herself,' as the

phrase goes, between the fixture of her dress, the suppressed "Oh, crikeys!" of the mob of boys, and the presence of Mr. Whittlebury, returned that gentleman's courtesy as he ascended the steps, by a nervous and random poke in the waistcoat with her parasol, by way of keeping him at a respectful distance, and then once again turned round, seized the knocker, and treated the neighbourhood to a final and remarkably loud flourish upon that household musical instrument.

Aunt Lucy having completed her flourish, to the great astonishment of Mr. Whittlebury, and the infinite amusement of the rabble, wound the scene handsomely up, by fainting properly away, and falling into the old gentleman's arms, just as he had applied his latch key and effected an entrance into the house.

The old gentleman, all surprise and trepidation, carried his fair burthen to the sofa, summoned the two young ladies from their chamber, into which they had bolted themselves upon the repeated alarms of the terrific knocking, and handed Aunt Lucy over to their care.

Mrs. Shrinkinwood was seen at the bottom of the garden, half-smothering 'Bobby' in her endeavours to pacify him and coax him to cease his barking,—that interesting animal having taken as much umbrage as the young ladies had taken fright, at the extraordinary hubbub of the knocker. Mrs. Shrinkinwood was instantly summoned in by the excited Mr. Whittlebury.

Under the care of the two young ladies, the sharp remedies administered by Mrs. Shrinkinwood, and the unremitted exertions of 'Bobby'—who kept snarling and snapping at any part of her person or dress which was within his reach, poor Aunt Lucy was once again brought to herself; sitting upright upon the sofa, she gazed timidly and quickly round the room, and finding that two young ladies were her only companions, she gradually recovered herself. Mrs. Shrinkinwood had found it necessary to retire with 'Bobby,' to prevent his amputating her little finger in his attempts to bite the strange lady; and had also judged it prudent not to produce herself to her late visiter upon her recovery, lest her deafness might be called in question, and her behaviour animadverted upon in any unpleasant manner.

"It was strange that no one answered the door," said Aunt Lucy, looking at her young companions.

Mary Grey shrunk from the gaze of the stranger; but Caroline answered, that Mrs. Shrinkinwood had called to them not to go to the door upon any account; and feeling frightened at the noise, they had retired to their own rooms.

Aunt Lucy made no further remark, but rose, shook hands kindly with her two nurses and departed; closing the door this time carefully after her, and taking elaborate care of her tail as she did so.

Caroline immediately went in search of her papa, in order to hear what accident had befallen the lady, but he was not to be found. He had left the house about ten minutes before the lady.

As Aunt Lucy turned the corner of Hill Street, she was met by a gentleman: she stopped—hesitated—walked on—stopped—hesitated again—with him at her side all the while—and finally, with some reluctance, allowed him to take her arm within his. That gentleman was Mr. Whittlebury.

As they passed down one of the green lanes (oh, those green lanes!) just out of the town—they were both, not exactly laughing very heartily—but they were both smiling away till their very cheeks ached, at their late curious rencontre; and were walking as happily and cosily together as if they had known each other from infancy.

CHAPTER XXIII.

TREACHERY.

SOMETIME after Tom had left Old Joan's residence, and when the dusk had well set in, two men knocked for admittance, and, like Tom, meeting with no encouragement to enter, entered without any. Old Joan was busy with a scanty preparation for her evening meal, and paid no attention to their arrival.

The stronger and more savage of the two immediately stepped forward, knocked the meagre fare out of the old woman's hands, and with many curses and imprecations demanded, why his usual supply of provisions had not been placed in its customary nook.

"It *was* placed there!" said the old woman, turning fiercely upon her savage visitor.

"It has not been there these three days!" said the fellow, clenching his fists and menacing. "We have been starved out, and have been into the town for grub."

"Then the fiend has taken it—as he will you!" said Joan. "I put it in the nook myself."

A heavy kick was the only response to this remark, vouchsafed by

the ruffian. He threw off his hairy cap and flung himself into the only chair in the place, and discovered the swarthy and savage features of Red Bill.

"You're a little too free of your hand, Bill," said Scrabbes. "You should not ha' hurt Mother Joan. I dare say somebody has found out where she hides the grub for us, and has cut off with it."

This conciliatory strain did not avail him anything with the old woman: she turned as fiercely upon him as she had done upon his companion.

"Free of his hand! Yes—and have not you been free of your hand? What makes you, skulking and hiding in a hole in the earth, and with such a companion as he is, but that you have been 'free of your hand' as you call it? But the time is coming for you both! I saw *that* to-day which will soon bring your blood-selling career to a close. Ay! and your master Blink's, as well—sly as he is!"

"What do you mean?" growled Red Bill, in a tone which seemed to intimate that some superstitious feelings were tugging at his courage—greatly to the danger of its overthrow—"What did you see?"

"The mid-day spectre of the mine!" said the old woman, in a whisper.

"Oh, ghosts be hanged!" said the fellow, with a very poor attempt at incredulity; "a ghost will never hurt me!"

"Wait till to-morrow, at twelve, and see!" said the old woman, shaking her bony finger at him and grinning like a fiend. "Remember! I always told you it would come. You refused to hear me once. In three days from the time you see it, you will be a dead man!"

Red Bill uttered a forced laugh, which sounded like the howl of some wild beast, and bade Old Joan Illfettle to give over her screeching and produce the gin. His spirits were however too much damped by the old fortune-teller's ominous prediction, to rally very speedily, even under the influence of the quantity of alcohol which he imbibed.

Scrabbes, taking advantage of a temporary lull in the conversation, hazarded another remark, in hopes to conciliate the old woman, but was as unfortunate as before.

"I never refused to hear you, Joan," said Scrabbes, suppliantly.

"You!—you sneaking cowardly abject cur—you have not the pluck to face a mouse! You, like Blink, listened, and promised, and fawned, and lied! and murdered with your pen as much as Bill did with his knife! Murdered—murdered—murdered!"

The old woman, in the excitement of her feelings, had raised her voice to such a pitch that there was every likelihood of the neighbours overhearing her. Red Bill suddenly rose, in much agitation.

"Hold hard there! This won't do, old woman: give us as much of your ghosts as you like—but, d——n it, don't take to playing with a man's neck after that fashion."

"Your neck's safe enough!" said the old woman, with marked emphasis.

Scrabbes applied both his hands to his neckcloth, and looked aghast at the inference thus thrown out.

Red Bill, relieved by this information, laughed again.

"I did not say you were not to die!" said the old fortune-teller sternly. Red Bill became suddenly silent. "You'll die within three days; and by your own hand!"

"I'll be d——d if I do!" said the ruffian, with another horse laugh. "Come along mate—let's leave old Mother Devilskind to herself; she's put out a little with our visit. But harkye, old woman! don't let us starve for three days again, or you'll have another call. It don't exactly suit us just now to be visiting the daylight."

"You won't visit it again!" said the old woman quietly.

The two fellows departed from Joan Illfettle's wretched dwelling, and sauntered side by side through the narrow and dirty lanes in the direction of the works;—Scrabbes turning his head and bending at every attempt of the passengers to catch sight of his face by the lights from the windows; Red Bill, on the contrary, staring down the curious with a fierce although a startled glance;—and thus they proceeded in silence, until they found themselves, by the calm and quiet starlight, in the open country.

"Bill!" said Scrabbes, suddenly stopping and glancing round; "I will not do it—you may take all; I will not go down the mine again!"

Red Bill also glanced warily around him, and then laid his heavy hand upon the shoulder of Scrabbes.

"Mate!" said he softly, "I'll have no skulking! Old Joan is right—you can murder with your *pen* as well as I can with a knife! You shall share this last fling with me, and then we'll give up trade, and set off—I to Meriker and you to the devil if you like: but you don't get out of my sight just yet. But look you, the job can be done more quietly than you think for, and will look like an accident. They are all coming to the works to-morrow, and are to come down the

shaft to show the women the mine :—that you heard, I suppose, while you were buying the bread ?”

Scrabbes sullenly nodded assent. Red Bill was again silent, and once more peered warily round him. Seeing all secure, he drew out his clasp knife, and made a movement of cutting. Looking his companion very hard in the face, he whispered—“*The rope !*”

“ But there will be somebody with the girl, in the basket,” whispered Scrabbes, gazing round into the darkness.

“ All the better,” said Red Bill, huskily ; “ the more the merrier ! Down they’ll come, and off we’ll go. She will be sure to be done for. Blink will hand over Old Silverwing’s £100, and we shall be gentlemen for ever !”

“ The cut in the rope will tell tales,” said Scrabbes, hesitating.

“ I’ll take care of that,” said his companion ; “ we’ll unravel and cut, and fray it, till it looks like wear.”

An intense and almost supernatural stillness seemed to reign around them all of a sudden, when Red Bill ceased speaking, and they both, as if by mutual consent, moved onwards.

A short walk soon brought them to the engine-house, and the shaft—now covered over to prevent accidents. The tall brick building looked twice its real size by the bright starlight, and, with its gigantic out-stretched arm, might be taken for some black monster, guardian of the entrance to the mine.

The night was dark. Red Bill and Scrabbes walked among the loose stones and refuse, and soon found themselves standing by the huge cylinder, round which was wound the rope, and attached to the end of the rope was the iron “basket”—formed like an immense scale, and now resting upon the wooden cover which was drawn over the mouth of the pit.

Red Bill looked round him, drew out his knife, and raised it to the rope.

“ Here—here,” said Scrabbes, nervously, “ take this flint, the cut will be more ragged.”

“ That will do,” said his companion. “ If your hands were only as steady as your head, Scrabbes, you’d distance all of us. D——n the flint, it won’t cut at all—I must take to the knife again.”

Red Bill flung the flint from him.

“ Hush !” said Scrabbes, alarmed at the rattle it made amongst the loose stones.

An anxious five minutes elapsed, during which the ruffian was busy with cutting away as much of the rope as would render the remainder incapable of sustaining any weight beyond a few pounds. He chose a portion of the rope which he calculated would allow of the descent of about thirty feet before the accident would be discovered.

"Have you unravelled it?" said Scrabbes, whispering.

"All right," said Red Bill, in a low tone; "give us some clay."

Scrabbes handed him some loose earth, which he rubbed into the destroyed part of the rope to hide its newness.

"That will do," said Red Bill, at last; "let's get back."

They both moved off through the cutting in the rock, and round by the "Maw," as the chasm at the back of the works was more familiarly called, and by means of the chain ladder descended.

"I am sorry for Old Whittlebury," said Scrabbes, shivering with the damp and cold, when they had arrived in their old habitation. "I wish we could keep him out of it."

"He may go to h——l for me," said the other ruffian; "the girl is our mark."

In the black depths of the mine sat the two scoundrels, like some obscure animals, plotting and planning their movements, after the success of their diabolical scheme. Scrabbes, under the influence of a quantity of gin, and feeling secure from the darkness—for their scanty fire and wretched candle scarcely lit even the confined limits of their parlour—and the rocky walls by which he was surrounded, almost emulating the savage hardihood of his companion.

Night passed from the earth's surface; and the day dawned upon which Mr. Whittlebury, accompanied by his daughter Caroline, Colonel Grey and Mary, was to visit the interior of the mine; the engine-house once again emitted its train of long black smoke, and the boiler sent forth its white and graceful vapour in rapidly curling wreaths.

The interior of a mine was new to all the party; and many an anxious flutter of the heart, during breakfast-time, was caused by the idea of descending to a tremendous depth by means of a few threads of twisted packthread, and many a consolatory idea broached, that hundreds had descended in safety before, and therefore where could be the danger now. Caroline Whittlebury was nervous and more than half-inclined to stay at home, and persuade her friend Mary to do so likewise; but as the party had been principally got up to gratify the longing curiosity expressed by both ladies—once a day for the last fortnight—they could not in gratitude do less than accept the invita-

tion, and therefore, with very white faces, and very palpitating hearts, they expressed themselves delighted beyond measure at the idea of swinging down a shaft half a mile deep, at the end of a rope.

Breakfast was finished at last by Mr. Whittlebury and his daughter, not that either of them ate anything;—the young lady from the palpitation consequent upon her approaching adventure, and her worthy papa from the reminiscences of his last evening's pleasing walk down the green lanes. He sat musing and smiling, until his daughter reminded him that they were to meet the Greys at the turnpike. The old gentleman put away his smiles, finished his coffee, and pronounced himself ready.

The morning was beautifully clear, though frosty and cold, and they walked on, and joined the Colonel and his daughter. The two young ladies took each other's arms and walked forward, each expressing to the other her fears and anxieties; Caroline in particular, trying in vain to divest herself of a feeling of coming evil, for which she could not account, but which, the nearer they approached the scene, became more and more predominant.

Her more timid companion rallied her upon her want of courage, and by the time the tall form of the old engine-house was discernible, had succeeded in recalling her a little to herself.

The party soon reached the spot, and stood among the rubbish which surrounded the mouth of the shaft.

Teddy Ewbank, a young miner in attendance upon the party, drew the wooden covering aside, and exposed to the young ladies a large round opening in the ground. They immediately went to the brink and peered down the darksome depth, but drew back again giddy and pale.

After a while spent in examining the back of the works, the "Maw," and the engine-house, the party prepared to descend. When they returned from their ramble, they found the cover replaced over the shaft, with a large iron basket, used in the descent, standing upon it, and suspended by its chains to the rope which was to lower them into the bowels of the earth; the rope passed over a strong pulley, fixed directly over the mouth of the pit, and was carried over other pulleys until it was wound round the great cylinder turned by the steam-engine.

"All ready, Ewbank?" said Mr. Whittlebury, turning laughingly away from some badinage of the Colonel's.

"All ready, sir!" said Ewbank, running his eye along the rope.

After a little argument about who was to go first, whether all

should not go together, and other matters of hesitation, it was decided that the two young ladies should first make the descent by themselves, and should wait at the foot of the shaft their papas' arrival. They were handed through the rubbish, and on to the cover of the mine, by Teddy Ewbank, who good-naturedly spread his flannel jacket over the basket. They stepped lightly into the iron vessel, and were directed by Teddy to sit quiet and hold on by the chains, and on no account to attempt to stand up.

"All ready now—Hoi!" shouted Ewbank to the man at the engine.

The chains of the basket clanked as they were drawn tight, and the two young ladies felt themselves gradually raised a few feet. In a moment Teddy withdrew the cover from under them, and they were suspended over the mouth of the pit.

"Hoi!" shouted Ewbank, again, and the great cylinder began to unrol the rope which was to carry them safely to the bottom, if it held together.

"Who is at the engine?" said Mr. Whittlebury.

"I don't know his name, sir,—Red Bill, we call him," said Ewbank.

Mr. Whittlebury made no reply, but waved his hand to the young ladies as they disappeared beneath the level of the ground.

"Hoi!—not so fast!" shouted Ewbank, as the cylinder began to revolve very rapidly. No notice being taken of his admonition, he flew into the engine-house and checked the movement in person, exchanging a rough word or two with his fellow-miner.

The young ladies gained courage the first few feet of their descent, and were amused with, and chatted over the appearances of, the many different strata of earths through which they passed; in a few moments, however, the rapidity of the descent, and the cold damp atmosphere chilled them into silence;—they were passing through rock, and the wet ran down the sides and dropped from above like the commencement of a shower;—there was but little light also, and they looked up at the hole through which they had been lowered with palpitating hearts and short breath, silently wondering how much deeper they were to descend. Suddenly, to their great dismay, the basket began to turn round, at first gently, gradually increasing its force until its gyrations became sickening in the extreme, while, to add to their terror, the rate of their descent became tremendous. "Good Heaven! the rope has broken!" said Emily, gazing upwards.

Mr. Whittlebury and the Colonel stood at the mouth of the shaft, silent and anxious, watching the rope as it ran down. In an instant

they were horror-struck at seeing a part of it as it came over the cylinder suddenly give way, and its many plies begin to untwist themselves and fly round with great force. Both gentlemen shouted at once, and ran to the engine-house.

Red Bill had disappeared, after having put the wheel on to full speed, so as to allow of as much of the rope as possible to escape over the cylinder, and by that means make more certain of his diabolical purpose.

Teddy Ewbank ran in, and in spite of the two gentlemen's remonstrances, and deaf to their entreaties, allowed the speed to continue for some moments, gradually checking it as he knew the basket was nearing the bottom of the shaft.

Round spun the rope, throwing off fresh strands at every turn, and down—down went the basket, with a rapidity which deprived its fair burthen both of breath and eye-sight, until they felt a gradual check to the speed, and were suddenly landed at the bottom in safety, but with a shock which threw them both out upon the sloppy ground at the foot of the shaft.

"Thank God!" said both the poor girls in a breath.

They had no sooner been thrown out than the rope gave way entirely, and fell crackling and roaring into the seat which they had so lately occupied, sending an echo like thunder along the dark chambers of the mine.

The sight of the immense heap of rope, coiled like a pyramid upon the iron scale, terrified the young ladies excessively. They clung to each other, and screamed for help. They stood in the dark, ankle deep in mud, and with the damp of the walls dripping upon them, gazed wildly upwards towards the top of the shaft—now looking no larger than the end of a telescope. Their eyes however soon became accustomed to the dim obscure which surrounded them, and perceiving that all help from the shaft was, for some time at any rate, hopeless, they betook themselves to examining the spot upon which they were standing:—four passages branched off, but all dark as midnight.

They stood for some minutes, clasped together, gazing down the black depths, when, to their unspeakable joy, a faint light began to glimmer from one of the passages. They waited with anxious and beating hearts, until two men, each bearing a piece of candle in a cleft stick, emerged and stood before them.

The aspects and appearances of the men made the young women cling more tightly together.

"Hope you arn't hurt, ladies," said Scrabbes, with a voice almost inarticulate from fear and anxiety.

Red Bill took no notice of the ladies, but examined the rope. "The untwisting saved 'em!" said he, in an undertone, to his companion. "Another pound would have done the business!"

"How can we get up again?" said Caroline; "or, how can my father come down to us?"

"Not nohow," said Red Bill, "unless you can fly either of you." And then suddenly checking himself, he said, "There is one way, if you have the courage to try it!"

"Give me a light, and show us the way," said Caroline, throwing her arm round her all-but-fainting friend.

The two men hesitated, as to which was to surrender his light. Red Bill at last gave his into the hands of Caroline, and picked up instead a long crow-bar.

Caroline supported her companion on first, down the damp and slimy opening intimated by the finger of Red Bill, followed at a little distance by the two ruffians.

"What do you want with that bar?" said Scrabbes, in a whisper.

"Nothing!" said his companion; "only now the bird is fairly caught, I don't mean to be a fool about it—that's all."

"Would not 'The Wash' do the business as well?" said Scrabbes, in the same whisper.

Red Bill nodded his approval, and pushed on in front. The two fellows then led their victims through the gloomy arches of the mine—from chamber to chamber—from one level to another—until the sound of rushing water met their ears. Upon the lowest level of the mine ran this dark and subterranean river, called by the miners, from the rapidity and turbulence of its current, "The Wash." At one spot, where it was confined into a comparatively narrow channel by its rocky banks, a long plank was thrown across—slippery with the damp atmosphere and precarious from the dim light of the candles by which it was seen.

Towards this spot Red Bill and his companion guided the two girls, assuring them that their safety depended upon their crossing the plank, and that an escape was easily effected from the other side of the stream.

They hesitated. Scrabbes crossed; and with his candle held down to the plank, invited and encouraged them to make the attempt.

A distant "Hallo!" just as they were upon the point of venturing, met their ears. All stood still, and listened.

"That is my father's voice!" said Caroline, greatly relieved.

"All right, young lady," said Red Bill, "he has come down by the way you are going up."

"But it seemed to come from behind us," said Caroline.

"It was the echo!" said Bill.

Another "Hallo!" in the same voice, seemed to confirm this statement.

Scrabbes again held down his light to the plank, and Mary, with Caroline close behind her, stepped upon the slippery and unsteady path. The black water was roaring and breaking into angry little waves beneath them, and foaming against the sides of the banks.

A third "Hallo!" evidently nearer than the last, encouraged the poor girls to venture onwards; when Red Bill, applying his crow-bar to the end of the plank, and heaving it on one side, the two young ladies tottered on their treacherous footpath for a moment, and then fell, screaming and clinging to each other, into the deep and rushing stream!

Red Bill and Scrabbes extinguished their lights immediately, and made the best of their way back to the upper parts of the mine, creeping, and cringing, and listening for the voice as they proceeded, in order not to come in contact with its owner.

The voice rang through the mine, calling upon Caroline and Mary, but no answer was returned. The heavy tramp of many feet echoed through the darksome arches, and light from numberless torches glanced from the arched roof, as the bearers ran in twos and threes in various directions, climbing the piles of rubbish and holding their flambeaux far above their heads, in hopes of catching sight of the objects of their search.

Mr. Whittlebury and the Colonel, accompanied by Ewbank and a party, had descended by the chain ladder, and after assuring themselves that no accident had happened at the shaft, were terribly alarmed at the absence of the young ladies.

All that morning was spent in a harassing and fruitless search.

Ewbank suddenly recollected Red Bill and his mate, and hastened with all the party to their "parlour." They were gone!—and the gentlemen returned to the town, with the last remaining hope—that the young ladies had escaped by their assistance and had reached home before them.



TREACHERY.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE MID-DAY SPECTRE OF THE MINE

IN consequence of Mr. Whittlebury and the Colonel having anticipated the time of their visit by two full hours, Old Joan Illfettle's scheme, of bringing Tom and Caroline face to face under the dark arches of the mine, fell to the ground.

The unhappy descent of the principal party had been effected, and the consequent unavailing search for the young ladies instituted and given over,—at least as far as the mine was concerned,—long before the time when Tom presented himself at the Devil's Maw, in obedience to the old fortune-teller's behest. Tom having left the town about the same time that Mr. Whittlebury and his party entered it, the report of the fearful accident at the shaft, and the mysterious disappearance of the bodies, had not reached his ear. Tom and his ragged little guide therefore arrived at the specified time, and prepared for their descent by the ladder, in happy ignorance of the fatal catastrophe.

Tom had noticed, upon his approach to the works, that the tall chimney of the engine-house was sending forth its long black volume of smoke, and that the mouth of the pit was open, and the rope hanging down it; and argued therefrom, with many flushes of delight, the presence of the parties most dear to him in the deep caverns beneath, and amused himself mightily with fancying the surprise which would seize upon them at discovering him in so sudden a manner, and totally put on one side all past disagreeables, as impossible to be entertained in such a romantic situation.

Tom—after one or two cautious peeps over the brink of the misty chasm down which he was to descend, and several encouraging invitations from his young guide, who stood upon the ladder with his head just visible above ground—commenced his adventure with some nervousness and anxiety, increased perhaps a little after he had succeeded, in reaching a part of the rock which jutted suddenly outwards, so as to throw the chain—as the ladder was called—very much out of its original position, by the boy calling out loudly to him, to “have a care of himself just there, ’cause Billy Black, who was a little ‘toppy,’ was broke all to smash by not minding his footing!” And, to add to Tom's discomfiture, one of the rounds or steps of the ladder was broken, obliging him to hang on as well as he was able, and slide down as it were and feel for the next with his

foot,—not a very agreeable situation under any circumstances, but particularly trying when experienced in a cold clammy damp atmosphere, with sharp-headed gigantic rocks dripping and frowning on all sides, and just light enough to show the bottom through the mist and haze which intervened. Tom succeeded however in turning the dangerous corner, and after descending some part where the chain slanted inwards, by clinging and hanging on by feet and hands in an inverted position, and then walking along several ledges of rock until the chain was again in requisition, and then once more trusting to its rusty and rough strength, he found himself among the ruins of the fallen roof at the bottom of the mine, and gazed upwards with a cold feeling of terror at the chasm through which he had entered—now reduced to the size of an ordinary hole. Thin blueish vapours floated between him and the roof, like phantom clouds. These vapours were condensed, and ran down and dripped from the rocks, causing a damp and piercing chill, which seemed to penetrate his very bones. Tom buttoned his coat and shivered, and turned to look about him: his little guide had disappeared, and he stood alone in one of the great chambers of the mine.

He was suddenly startled by the appearance of Old Joan Illfettle at his side: the dim and misty atmosphere, and the inexperience of Tom's eyesight to the peculiar light, had enabled her to approach him without discovery. She stood before him as if she had started out of the earth.

Tom instantly perceived that her clothes were wet through, and that she was without her cloak.

"Have you heard anything?" said the old woman in anxious tones, and clutching Tom fiercely by the arm.

"No!" said Tom. "Why? That is, I have heard nothing but this confounded drizzle, drizzle, drizzle—drip, drip, drip, which seems to have given you a thorough wetting, and will do the same good office for me, unless I can get under cover pretty soon."

"Follow me then, and you will hear something more!" said the old woman, giving his arm such an energetic squeeze that it tingled again.

Tom followed immediately, stumbling over the many stray pieces of rock which had either fallen from the roof or had been blown from their bed by the repeated blasts used in detaching the iron-stone. It was as much as he could do to keep pace with Joan Illfettle. Old though she was, an intimate acquaintance with the ground over

which she led the way, gave her an advantage more than commensurate with the youthful energy of her companion ; she stopped and beckoned him onwards, when he seemed to hesitate,—until they reached a part of the mine more savage, wild, and rugged in appearance than any through which they had yet passed, and also lighted from the roof, but by a much smaller and higher aperture than the ‘Maw.’

In the centre of this tremendous chamber was piled an immense heap—almost a small mountain—of loose stone, rubbish, and wreck of all descriptions ; up this stony hill Old Joan led the way, neither pausing nor speaking until she reached the summit, where she stood some minutes watching Tom as he laboured to follow her.

“Stand here in the light, until I come to you again,” said the old woman, as soon as Tom, panting and wondering, had reached the uppermost ridge.

Tom stood for a minute, and noticed that the day beams streamed down, broken and subdued, in a narrow belt of pale unearthly light, and fell directly upon the top of the mount upon which he was standing. He had scarcely time to notice the dim and ghostly aspect it gave to all around him, before he was aware that the old woman had commenced a precipitate retreat. He immediately ran down, seized hold of her, and demanded what all this scrambling and mystery was to lead to.

“Murder !” shouted Old Joan,—but whether in answer to Tom’s question, or in consequence of his violence, she left him to meditate. The suddenness and energy with which she uttered her cry caused him to relax his hold of her dripping garments : she threw up his hand and disappeared in the twilight.

Tom hesitated, and was perplexed. A voice suddenly reached his ears, seemingly close to him—the tones were those of Old Joan.

“Stand quiet—and you shall see and know all !”

“All what ?” said Tom, feeling exceedingly uncomfortable—but he received no answer.

Old Joan, after leaving Tom perched up on the mount, threaded her way through various cuttings and darksome chambers, visiting on her way the deserted parlour of Red Bill and his mate Scrabbes ; here she groped about and found a piece of candle, which she lit by means of a lucifer, and went onward again ; climbing another immense heap of refuse, she entered a sort of cave at some height from the foundation, the opening of which was not large enough to admit a person unless

in a stooping posture. At the extreme end of this small chamber, shivering with fear of detection, crouched Red Bill and his companion in villany, Scrabbes. Red Bill, the instant the feeble ray of the candle reached him, and long before Old Joan appeared, sprung up, and, with the same long crow-bar in his hand with which he had effected his diabolical scheme upon the two girls, stood upon the defensive, glaring down the opening, ready to strike or run as opportunity offered.

"What brought *you* here?" said Red Bill, fiercely, sinking the bar to the ground, but still standing ready to strike.

"To tell you that they are closing the mine, taking away the chain, and abandoning the works, and that you will starve if you stay here any longer. You must out and face the daylight," said Joan.

"I shall do as I please," said the ruffian, doggedly.

"Do so—and die before your time!" said the old woman; then lowering her voice, she whispered "*It will be here presently!*"

At this moment Scrabbes, who had been a silent, though far from an inattentive listener, sprang to his feet, knocked the candle out of Old Joan's hand, rushed past her, and escaped from the cave. Red Bill, as fast as the darkness would permit, immediately followed and overtook him just at the foot of the mound upon which Tom was keeping his watch.

"Let me go—let me go!" cried Scrabbes, struggling and striking violently at his old friend. "I will not stay! I know what she means!—I have seen it before—often and often in my dreams—its deep red wounds gaping, and the blood running from them like water!"

"Hold your fool's clatter, you cur!" said Bill, from between his teeth, seizing him by the throat in a way which all but choked him.

"Let me go—let me go!" said the other, as well as he was able. "You said we were to go when this last job was done."

"And so we were; but who was to guess at all them fools choosing to come down just at the time, and going shouting all over the works," returned Red Bill, relaxing his gripe.

"I will go now!" yelled Scrabbes, breaking from his companion. "Nothing shall keep me!" But he had miscalculated either his strength or his opportunity: Red Bill caught him before he had gone a yard, and in true Westmoreland style threw him upon his back, not however before Scrabbes had had time to fix his hand on his collar, and thereby bring him down likewise.

They lay struggling for the mastery for some minutes: an earnest and anxious desire for escape giving to Scrabbes almost supernatural energy. He yelled at and bit his antagonist like a wolf mad with terror; but Red Bill held on with the tenacity of a man who knew that his safety depended upon his not quitting his hold.

Joan Illfettle reached the spot just as they had become somewhat exhausted by the ferocity of their struggle. "Look up!—look up!" said she, in a tone so suppressed that it made the blood of the panting villains run cold at their hearts. "Look up!" and she pointed with her shaking and skinny finger.

Red Bill let go his hold upon his companion, and started to his feet: the change upon his hardened features was tremendous—every drop of blood rushed from his lips and cheeks in an instant, and left them a dull sickly yellow—his eyes seemed ready to burst with the intensity of the stare with which he regarded the top of the mound.

A male figure was seen stationary and wrapped in a cloak, surrounded by the pale and dim light which flowed from above.

"Why that is——" commenced the conscience-sticken ruffian, in a thick and choking tone, but he was unable to complete the sentence—the words died away in a hoarse whisper.

"It is ——!" said Joan, "You are right; and he has come—as I told you he one day would—to demand of you blood for blood! and life for life! The Mid-day Spectre of the Mine!"

"I did not—I did not!" stammered the fellow, "it's a lie! she was killed by accident. I had nothing to do with it—nothing—nothing!"

"Who talked of *her*?" said Old Joan.

Scrabbes, who had lain prostrate the whole of the time, with his fingers almost thrust into his eyes, lest he should behold the figure he so much dreaded,—and which, by the constant workings of his guilt-laden conscience, he was continually seeing in his dreams,—could not suppress a low groan of terror.

"Get up, you cringing hound!" said Joan; "you are called as well as him!" And she spurned him with her foot, but nothing would induce the trembling wretch to move from the position into which he had first thrown himself.

"Get up, I say. What your pen planned, his knife executed. You are both dead men within five days. See—the Spectre leaves you!" Joan paused. Red Bill had some minutes before covered his eyes and slunk trembling behind a mass of rock, which shielded him from view,

The figure slowly moved along the ridge of the mound, and then disappeared.

"What say you now?" said the old woman, in a loud and jeering tone. "Both of you—you, who would despise me for my knowledge, and disbelieve in my sight of future events? Do you believe *now* that the dead come among the living?—or must you see another?"

"We never doubted your book-learning, and your foreign lingo, and your reading and writing," mumbled Red Bill.

"You will not doubt it again, I am thinking," replied Old Joan, "and now I'll leave you to your fates. I have others to attend to." And Joan Illfettle departed.

The two stricken miscreants remained stunned and silent for some minutes, trembling, and in their terror scarcely daring to move lest the dreaded phantom should again cross their path. They feared to return to the rocky lair, from which they had been so unpleasantly disturbed, and still less dared to leave the mine, the path laying directly across the ridge so lately occupied by their mysterious visiter.

Scrabbes at last lifted his head, looked cautiously round, and not having seen the direction in which the spectre had appeared, rushed impetuously up the mound, crossed the very spot, and was gone before his companion could find presence of mind enough to stop him.

Red Bill, shivering, and with a sickening feeling of terror at his heart, slunk down at the foot of the rock behind which he had been hiding himself, wiped his cold damp forehead with the back of his horny hand, and breathed like a man resting after a lengthened and exhausting race. He disturbed a few loose particles of stone with his shoulder as he leaned: the rattle occasioned by their falling acted upon his excited imagination like magic; he started nervously to his feet, glared fearfully and shrinkingly behind him, and with one bellow of terror, rushed up the mound, shutting his eyes and lowering his head as he passed under the stream of daylight where he had seen the figure of the Phantom of the Mine.

Madly and rapidly he sprung up the chain, nor relaxed his speed for an instant until he had reached the daylight. Once above ground, he turned and gazed at the 'Maw,' cursing it, and all it contained, with a deep and bitter curse, and then wended on his way to the town in hopes of overtaking his old companion Scrabbes.

Old Joan, upon leaving her trembling victims, hastened to the spot

upon which she had left Mr. Thomas Racquet, and to her great surprise found him not.

Tom had waited until his small stock of patience had become nearly exhausted, expecting every instant to receive an explanation, after some fashion or other, of the old woman's most mysterious conduct. Hope had been whispering to his heart that she had some design in view relative to his meeting with a certain young lady, and he was proportionately disappointed when he at last saw her standing at the foot of the mound in company with two men, and seemingly treating them to a lecture, and pointing with much gesticulation to himself. Construing this action of Old Joan's in an unfavourable light, Tom left his elevated situation, and sought his way through the rocky labyrinth of the mine alone. He was soon however convinced of the impracticability of his attempt, therefore made the best of his road back again to the foot of the chain by which he had descended, resolving to wait there either until the old woman returned or until some person passed who would accompany and guide him through the works.

Tom remained here some time alone, gazing upwards and tracing with his eye the course of the chain down which he had made his perilous way,—diminishing to a thread as it reached the summit. His eyes having become in some measure accustomed to the twilight he was enabled to distinguish objects with more accuracy, and to speculate upon the height of the forms around him, and examine the many petrifactions of strange and unknown animals, large and curiously-formed shells, and other indications of the world before the flood, which lay inbedded in the walls. With characteristic impatience, however, he soon tired of this employment, and fancying he saw a glimmer of light at the end of what seemed a long gallery or cutting, he set off in the direction without waiting any longer. He was not deceived; the cutting led in a straight line directly from the place where he was standing to the foot of the principal shaft, and was traversed the whole distance by an iron tram-road or railway. After coming in contact once or twice, rather sharply, with the roof of this low gallery, and occasionally stepping into a hole of mud and water, and stumbling against the dripping and slimy wall, Tom stood directly under the shaft, and gazed with surprise at the huge and tangled heap of heavy rope which was lying about in all directions. He stepped into the iron basket, now partially cleared of its contents, and gazed upwards. Upon perceiving a loose end of rope dangling down the shaft, the startling thought

struck him, that the confused mass which lay coiled around must have become detached, and that a fearful and fatal accident must have occurred. He instantly sprang to where he saw the end of the rope, flung, as it had been, by many an anxious hand but an hour before, a little further into the light. He examined it: its appearance at once confirmed his worst fears—it had evidently broken. The thought that it might have given way when Caroline and her father were descending, rendered him for a moment motionless;—in the next instant he was tearing at the rope, which still remained piled upon the basket, and removing it as fast as he was able, in order, if possible, to discover any vestiges of accident,—but none such appeared. He sat down upon the pile of cordage, panting from his exertions, and with hands clasped—almost strained together, cried like a child in thankfulness of heart at the discovery. He felt certain that the rope must have given way during the morning, and that the old woman's anxious question, "Whether he had heard anything," must have referred to this circumstance. A part of the muddy ground, a little way down an opening which branched off from where he sat, attracted his attention; he approached and moved it with his foot—from its peculiar form he was induced to examine it closely. With unsteady hands and straining eyes, he raised from the clay, into which it had been either crushed or trampled, a small square of linen—it was a handkerchief; he held it up eagerly against the little light the place afforded.—"C. W." was embroidered on one of the corners.

"Then the worst *has* happened!" said Tom, as he again seated himself upon the coil of rope, with a heart almost bursting with agony. "The worst *has* happened, and all is over!"

"All is not over, Thomas Racquet," said Old Joan, close to his ear, and laying her hand heavily upon his shoulder, "and the worst has not happened—*vengeance* is to come!"

"This is no time for foolery!" said Tom, starting up passionately. "Tell me at once, old woman, has any one been killed by the fall?"

"The fall did not kill them!" said Old Joan, significantly.

"Who fell?" said Tom, breathless with anxiety.

"Miss Whittlebury and Colonel Grey's daughter," said the old woman.

"Fallen—and not killed!—where are they then?" said Tom.

"No one knows; they were missing when the party arrived to help them," replied the old woman.

"What do you mean by 'vengeance'?" said Tom, putting question after question so rapidly that there seemed scarcely time for an answer.

"Does rope like this *break*?" said the old woman, pointing to the ragged end with her foot.

"Break?" said Tom, abstractedly.

"Aye *break*! Look at it and judge for yourself, whether a rope which has carried tons would give way with so light a burthen as two young girls!"

"It has been *cut*!" said Tom, stooping and examining the rope more attentively.

"It has," said Joan; "and by one who had an object in doing it."

"Old woman," said Tom, suddenly, "you and I don't part until you tell me more of this matter than you seem inclined to do. We must up above ground, and see some one in authority. You evidently know *who* did this diabolical deed, and, by Heavens, I will not part with you until I have sifted the whole story to the bottom."

Tom laid his hand upon the old woman's arm, and forced her forward toward the chain, forgetting that four times his strength would not be sufficient to ensure her ascent from the mine by the then only available outlet.

"Reserve your strength, Thomas Racquet," said the old woman, suddenly facing him, "you will need it for those who wish you worse than I do. Ten times your power cannot force me up the chain, if I refuse to go. Loose your hold for an instant; your gripe hurts my arm."

Tom slackened his hand slightly. In a moment the old woman writhed from his custody, and darted away, whither Tom, in his hurry and anxiety, coupled with the darkness of the place, could not see.

Tom hesitated for a minute; and then determined to return to Weldon with all possible speed, see Colonel Grey, and have this old woman apprehended, resolving at the same time to displace the uppermost range of the chain, by drawing the iron pins which sustained it, and so imprison Old Joan Ilfettle within the mine until the proper authorities could wait upon her in person.

Tom made his ascent with more ease than his descent, and after a quarter of an hour's hard work, succeeded in drawing the two iron pins which confined the uppermost length of the chain, and had the

satisfaction of hearing some twenty feet of it fall, ringing and clanking, against the rocks at the bottom. He immediately set forth for Welderton, in order to gather information, and lay the account of his interview with Old Joan before Old Mr. Whittlebury and his friend Colonel Grey.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SEARCH.

THE instant Tom entered the suburbs of Welderton he perceived that something of an extraordinary nature was agitating the inhabitants. In the lower part of the town through which he had to pass first, little knots of eager miners were gathered together, listening to others who were evidently detailing some news. Young Ewbank, around whom one of the largest of the crowds had congregated, declaimed loudly and with much gesticulation. Tom, in hopes of hearing something bearing upon the subject nearest his heart at the moment, stopped and joined the excited auditory. The young miner went on with his speech.

"What if we are at loggerheads with him—what if we *do* mean to teach him that a fair day's work is worth a fair day's wage—what if we have struck,—why we've struck like men, and not like savages—we don't want to commit murder, much less upon a couple of weak girls. I tell you the rope was cut, and I think it was cut for me, thinking I should most likely go down first—because I said, and I say again, that *that* man isn't a fit mate for anybody, and that he only came back again to the 'Nest' because he's afraid of being anywhere else. He looked devilish queer and glaring like about the eyes, when he was letting the cylinder go like mad, and I stopped him. I didn't notice it then—but I remember it now. He meant it either for me or Old Mr. Whittlebury, that's certain; and I upheld that he ought to be kicked out of the strike and hanged!"

A low growl, and several dark threats of suspending the culprit half-way down the shaft, issued from the dirty group.

"Have the ladies been found?" said Tom aloud, from the outside of the ring.

"No—no, sir, they haven't!" cried several of the miners together,

making room for Tom to join the group, and then gradually surrounding him as they learned that he had just left the mine.

Tom received all the details of the accident, and the search which followed it, from Ewbank, and gave him in return an account of his interview with Old Joan, and told also how he had imprisoned her, by throwing down the chain.

This information was not very well received by the miners;—Joan Ilfettle was held in some awe among them; many strange tales of her power were abroad, and many a dark deed was attributed to her supernatural agency. There was a sudden silence in the little ring of heretofore noisy miners.

"I'm not a going to flinch at Old Joan," said Ewbank, at last. "I don't believe in her thundering ghosts; and as to the 'Mid-day Spectre' that she makes such a fuss about, all I can say is, I never saw it, though I've been in the works since I could crawl; and if she is a witch, why all the better for she, and all the less hurt; she can get out again without troubling us. But as to that carroty rascal, if I catch him within ten yards of my fist, I'll give him something to remember me by!"

"If he don't give you the knife first!" said one of the group. "He always carries one about him."

The attention of the crowd was suddenly directed to the town bill-sticker, who was waddling away after having pasted a large placard against the corner of an empty house, offering a reward for the capture of the miner known by the name of Red Bill.

The crowd could scarcely refrain a shout when the document was interpreted by Young Ewbank—the only one among them who was able to read.

Tom, in the excitement which followed, set forward with additional speed for the residence of Colonel Grey, the presiding magistrate,—having heard quite sufficient to convince him that foul play had been intended, although it had fallen upon the wrong persons.

The upper part of the town was in as much excitement as the lower; several ragged fellows, with stentorian voices, were earning their dinners by shouting through the high street—"The 'ole, full, true, and partic'lar account of the 'orrid Accident at the Wren's Nest Works; the cutting of the Shaft Rope, and the Murder of the beautiful Miss Whittlebury and her friend Miss Grey!"

Tom hurried past the gaping shop-keepers without looking right or left, and came in smart contact with one curious handmaiden's head

and knocked the same violently against the area railings;—she having protruded that part of her person without the prescribed boundary in hopes of catching an inkling of the tremendous news while the bawlers were still at the top of the street. On turning round at the corner, to apologize for the accident, without stopping, Tom almost ran between the fore-legs of a tall horse with a low-wheeled (under duty) chaise, seemingly attached to the end of his tail. Tom pulled up—(so to speak)—just in time to avoid a collision, and so did the long-legged horse.

“Mr. Racquet!” shouted a male voice, which Tom knew very well.

Tom looked up and saw a stoutish old gentleman, and a long lady with an ermine boa, muff, tippet and trimmings, and a crusty-looking little pug-dog—all three seated in the chaise. The gentleman was Mr. Whittlebury, the lady who was driving was Mrs. Shrinkinwood, and the little crusty-looking pug was ‘Bobby.’

“Tom—Tom Racquet!” called Mr. Whittlebury again, seeing him hesitate.

Tom advanced to the side of the chaise, and without further ceremony spoke of his intention of applying to the magistrate, in consequence of the strange behaviour of the old woman at the mine.

“You have been at the mine then?” said Old Mr. Whittlebury, in great anxiety.

“Yes, I have,” said Tom; “and I have found Miss Whittlebury’s handkerchief in the mud!”

“Jump into the gig then, and come with us,” said the old gentleman interrupting; “I’m going on at once to Colonel Grey’s. My poor girl is not in Hill Street, and must have gone on there with Mary—Miss Grey that is. Jump in: we shall want your evidence.”

Tom attempted to step into the vehicle, but ‘Bobby,’ who seemed to have a traveller’s dislike to ‘three in a gig,’ snapped and snarled with such ultra-canine ferocity that his loving mistress, after half throttling him as usual with the blue ribbon, was obliged totally to smother him in the ermine muff before he could be prevailed upon to allow the entrance of the stranger. Tom got in at last, and by dint of holding tightly on to Mr. Whittlebury, and balancing himself upon the side rail, avoided turning a somerset backwards out of the rear of the chaise. ‘Gustavus’ who was a very accommodating animal of a horse—(by the by, his name was ‘Chips’ before the purchase of the chaise,)—trotted on very quietly with the party, jerking up the little vehicle at every movement of his huge shoulders, and throwing up

his head at every step in acknowledgment of his mistress' incessant chirping and tugging at the reins.

Mrs. Shrinkinwood had offered the use of her carriage to the gentlemen the moment they arrived in the town after the accident, and had with inquisitive generosity tacked herself to the bargain ;—'Gustavus,' as she said, refusing to be driven by any other person except herself. The Colonel, however, meeting a friend while waiting for the turn-out, borrowed his horse and rode on first, leaving Mr. Whittlebury to follow as soon as Mrs. Shrinkinwood could get into her ermine and 'Gustavus' could be got into the chaise.

"Just stop, while I see my Aunt for a moment," said Tom, as they approached the inn where Miss Lucy Racquet was still sojourning.

"I have already seen her," said Mr. Whittlebury ; "do not stop. Lend me the reins, Mrs. Shrinkinwood, and I will see if 'Gustavus' cannot be made to get on a little."

Mrs. Shrinkinwood handed the reins to Mr. Whittlebury with a smile, while 'Bobby,' getting one of his vicious little eyes from under the muff, gave a spiteful half-suffocated and sputtering bark of remonstrance,—for which he got his nose well rapped with the butt end of the whip by the anxious Mr. Whittlebury.

"Confound the dog and the horse too !" said the old gentleman, as 'Gustavus' gave unequivocal symptoms of slackening his pace the instant he found that a strange hand was upon the reins.

"Let me have him," said Tom.

Mr. Whittlebury gave up the reins impatiently.

Tom tried his hand in no very gentle way upon 'Gustavus,' but that discriminating animal, disapproving of Tom's fiery regimen altogether, came to a full stop, and shook his ears, as much as to say that "it was no go,"—unless he was allowed to use his own discretion.

The two gentlemen, anxious beyond measure for intelligence, cursed the beast's obstinacy very heartily, and handed the reins back to Mrs. Shrinkinwood, who had sat placidly smiling at 'Gustavus' the whole time, with 'Bobby' unmuffed and his head safely packed under her arm ; the moment 'Gustavus' felt the well-known tugging, and heard the accompanying chirp, he flourished his straggling tail, hung it over the dashing-iron, and trotted on again at his usual pace. Greatly to their surprise and annoyance, as soon as they arrived a little way into the country, several stones were thrown at the gig, and a voice shouted to them to stop, but no notice was taken of it, in their extreme desire to get forward.

During the ride nothing transpired between the old gentleman and Tom relative to their past misunderstanding; all trifling matters of annoyance seemed to have been forgotten in the one serious business of the moment. Tom spoke of his finding the handkerchief, recounted again and again the whole of his conversation with Old Joan, explained the cause of his visit to the neighbourhood with such ingenuousness, and shewed himself altogether such a clear-sighted serious and manly young fellow—now that an opportunity offered for such display—that Mr. Whittlebury scarcely knew him again, or rather—(for he had not time to give Tom's character a thought)—treated him all at once as an old friend found in need, and as an equal in every respect.

They had plenty of time for their conversation, 'Gustavus' always requiring two hours to go twelve miles, so that by the time they had reached the residence of the Colonel, all the speculations which could possibly be deduced from the disappearance of the two young ladies, the absence of the two miners, and the mysterious demeanour of Old Joan, were exhausted.

They were met at the head of the avenue leading to the Colonel's house by the gamekeeper, (stationed there for the purpose,) who informed them that the ladies had not been heard of; and that the Colonel had gone over to Fellborough, and would take Welderton again in his road home.

Poor Mr. Whittlebury, now nearly mad at the loss of his daughter, exhorted Mrs. Shrinkinwood to turn her horse's head once again homeward, and with heart sick with grief, and eyes swollen with pent-up tears, folded himself in his own thoughts, and spoke no further.

Tom jumped out of the gig, saying they would travel lighter, and get on more quickly without him, and that he could walk the distance almost as soon as they would drive. Mr. Whittlebury pressed his hand but said nothing. Tom did as he proposed, and the gig jingled on in advance.

Tom trudged on briskly—his mind bent upon revisiting the Wren's Nest, and searching every hole and corner of its extensive excavations, and so cross-questioning the old fortune-teller, that had she the cleverest imp that ever studied equivocation at her elbow, she should be caught at last. Glowing with the ardour of his schemes, and the speed of his walk,—(he had almost wrought himself into a run, in endeavouring to make his feet keep pace with his thoughts,)—he at last came within sight of Welderton, and halted for a moment to take off his hat and wipe his forehead.

A heavy stone came rattling down from among the trees at his feet.

Tom started on one side, and looked up and watched, remembering the salutes the gig had received at the same quarter a little while before.

Tom waited a few minutes, and then moved on into a more open part of the road. Another stone, so well aimed as almost to hit him, came whistling over the hedge.

Tom shouted "Hallo, there!" and stood still.

A third stone, with a white paper attached, came sailing from the same quarter, and fell at a little distance in front of him. Tom advanced and picked it up—the paper was dirty and crumpled and contained the following words, written in a short lawyer-like hand:—

"The rope was cut by Red Bill of the Wren's Nest, in order to kill Miss Grey. The fall did not hurt her, in consequence of the rope untwisting. She and her friend, Miss Whittlebury, were afterwards enticed and drowned in the 'Wash,' by the same party.

"Yours to command, if you will hold him harmless,

"KING'S EVIDENCE."

"P.S.—I tried to draw your attention as you drove to the Colonel's."

Tom was over the hedge, lofty as it was, in an instant, after he had read this document, but no person was to be seen; he ran to a little wood a short distance off, (and from which he felt convinced the missile must have been thrown,) but all seemed clear. After gazing about for a moment, with teeth clenched and eager eye, for the writer, he regained the road, determined to push on and lay this new and painful information before Old Mr. Whittlebury.

Tom was not long in reaching the town: his first object was to see his Aunt Lucy, and explain to her the melancholy cause of his protracted absence. But that lady was not within—she had been out all day, and so Tom posted on to Hill Street, the residence of Mr. Whittlebury; that gentleman, in consequence of information he had received, had proceeded, with the proper authorities, to search Old Joan Ilfettle's lodgings,—whence Tom posted after him, compressing the paper so tightly in his hand that his fingers ached again.

Upon reaching the dirty and wretched hovel of the old fortune-teller, Tom found a crowd of noisy idlers surrounding the door-way. He burst through them and opened the door, and, upon giving his name, was admitted, by Mr. Whittlebury's request. Colonel Grey was

also one of the party. Tom immediately produced the paper, which was read with great avidity by both gentlemen.

"We shall catch that villain before long," said the Colonel. "As to the 'Wash,' it is a very dark and rapid stream, but not above four feet deep. We did not get so low as that in our search. Let us instantly return, and drag it from end to end. Why such villany should be directed against poor Mary, I cannot imagine."

"I threw down the chain at the 'Devil's Maw,'" said Tom, "to make sure of the old woman. She cannot escape us."

"We will reve a new rope at the shaft," said Mr. Whittlebury and the Colonel both in a breath. "Where's Ewbank?"

Ewbank came down stairs at the moment with an officer, carrying a man's cloak over his arm.

"We found this cloak, sir, up stairs," said the officer, presenting it to the Colonel.

Tom joined the group, and taking the cloak in his hand turned back a small piece of cloth at the back of the collar, and beheld his own name.

"Why that is my cloak! I lent it to an old woman on the top of the Bedford 'Regulator,' some months ago," said Tom, in astonishment. "I could not think where I had seen that old fortune-teller's face before. No wonder she had my name so pat. There were papers relating to family matters in the pockets, which she has doubtless stolen and made use of."

"Take care of the cloak, Mr. Grab," said the Colonel, "it may lead to something. Ewbank, we must return to the works, and get to the lower level and search the 'Wash.' We have information that the ladies were thrown into it by that miscreant Red Bill and another man."

"Scrabbes!" said young Ewbank, in answer, clenching his fist, and striking out at some imaginary person or thing in front of him. "But how the devil are we to get there—we cannot have a new rope for some days at least. I have it!—I have it!" concluded the active young fellow, springing out of the cottage, and presently returning with a strong cord; "this will do! I can reach the chains with this, and you, gentlemen, must trust to my search until you can come down yourselves." And away went Young Ewbank with the speed of lightning.

The principal part of the day had been spent in riding about to different houses, in the hopes that the young ladies might, after their

escape from their perilous situation, have taken refuge under one of their friendly roofs. The hope thus kept alive, and the activity necessary for the journeys, had in some measure stunned, although not removed, the agony of heart felt by Old Mr. Whittlebury and the Colonel. Now, however, that hope seemed dead, and activity of no further avail, Mr. Whittlebury sank under his calamity,—his head fell upon his breast, the big salt tears trembled for a moment upon his eyelashes, and then gushed forth in one agonizing burst. The old gentleman turned away, bowed almost to the ground, and covered his face with his hands. Tom tried to comfort him, by still whispering hope to his heart, but a pressure of the hand was his only response; and a chilling silence rested for a while upon the whole party.

Suddenly, stung by the idea of giving way to useless grief when personal exertion might still be of service, he rushed out of the hovel after Ewbank, followed closely by Tom. The Colonel had departed with the officer, some moments before, and the place was once again silent and deserted.

The night was fast setting in, cold and cheerless, with every indication of a snow-storm; and the works, with their tall rocks and cumbersome machinery lying about, loomed dark against the heavy sky.

Mr. Whittlebury, Tom, Colonel Grey, and a number of the better-disposed of the workmen, soon congregated at the fearful chasm at the back of the works, with torches, flambeaux, pieces of lighted hemp upon the ends of sticks—anything, in short, which would give light enough to expedite their purpose.

Young Ewbank, torch in hand, with the rope securely fastened about his waist, was then lowered: but he speedily found that his scheme of raising the chain was impracticable; the whole of the upper length, about twenty feet, to where it joined a part which hung inward, and was consequently fixed independently, had given way, and had gone rattling to the bottom. As soon, therefore, as his feet touched the second and still steady length of chain, he shouted, and let go the rope from his person, bidding the party stay where they were until his return, which should be with all the speed he could make. Tom immediately prepared to follow him, but was with some difficulty prevented, the workmen reminding him that he would not be able to find his footing so easily as an experienced miner.

Minutes flew by, and hour after hour rolled on. One by one their torches went out, as the party sat or leaned about in groups, in expect-

tation of hearing the welcome shout of the returning adventurer. A fire of old wood was at last kindled, around which Mr. Whittlebury, Tom, and the Colonel, collected, looking in each other's faces for hope, and finding only despair.

The night still flew on, and all was silent; the snow fell in driving clouds; and, shivering and sick at heart, they had almost despaired of seeing Ewbank again, when his well-known shout came ringing up the chasm. The rope was instantly thrown to him by half a dozen eager hands; he fixed it, and was once again drawn to the surface.

"The plank that crosses the 'Wash' is gone," said Ewbank, the moment his head appeared upon a level with the ground; "gone clean and clever. I traced footprints from the shaft to where the plank was, and I found this torch upon the bank, but I could find no traces of Old Joan and the ladies. I shouted with all my might, but nobody answered."

"Did you cross the 'Wash'?" said half a dozen hoarse voices.

"No, I did not; I tried for it, though," said Ewbank, shaking the wet from his dress; "but the old works are so foul, that I could not have gone far, if I'd succeeded. There's fire-damp enough there to blow the whole place to shatters."

"They cannot have got there, you may depend upon it," said Tom, suddenly. "Where that old hag Joan is, the young ladies are also. I know not why, but I feel convinced of it. I remember now that her dress was wet through when she told me that they had escaped the fall. Besides, what has become of the plank?"

"Gone with the stream, most likely," said Ewbank. "It plunges into the gully, as we call it, with strength enough to suck a horse down."

This pithy explanation at once extinguished the little flash of hope to which Tom's hypothesis had given rise.

It was now evident to all parties, that nothing further could be done that night, or rather morning, for Ewbank's search had detained them until the cold grey twilight had begun to lighten the east. With melancholy forebodings they took their way through the frozen snow back to the town, there to concert further measures for the capture of Red Bill and Scrabbes, and the discovery of Old Joan Ilfettle.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CONJUNCTION OF VILLANY.

THE next day passed, during which the neighbourhood was ringing with various accounts of the murder, and all sorts of surmises as to what could be the object of so foul a deed. Large rewards were offered, and every exertion made to discover the retreat of the perpetrators of the crime. The writer of the letter picked up by Tom, and signed 'King's Evidence,' was advertised for, and enjoined either to appear or communicate further, and a promise of pardon was held out, as far as it lay in the power of the advertisers to grant. Nothing was thought of but the apprehension of the two missing miners. The men at the works forgot their cause of dispute with their owners, and joined hand and heart in the search,—but all to no purpose, no clue was found to the retreat of either Red Bill, Scrabbes, or Old Joan. A watch was set upon the mine day and night, in the hope that if the old woman were still concealed in its dark depths, famine would at last drive her forth; but hour after hour passed without her appearance,—still, however, the watchman kept his post.

A new length of chain and a new shaft-rope were in active preparation, and were expected to be ready for fixing on the next day. Mr. Whittlebury was in the act of speaking with the contractor on the morning after the fatal occurrence, when he was considerably startled by the sudden appearance of Mr. Horace Chuck, accompanied by a tall thin individual in black, with a white hat with a black crape hatband.

Mr. Horace Chuck introduced the individual as Mr. Jeremy Blink, of Furnival's Inn.

Mr. Whittlebury shook his partner mournfully by the hand, and in a few words detailed to him the events of the day just passed. Horace Chuck thrilled, in spite of himself, at the untimely fate of the two poor girls; but the feeling of grief soon passed, and gave way to an unbounded thirst for vengeance. Loud and deep were the threats which he uttered against the turn-outs, unless they returned to their allegiance on the morrow—the last day given them for deliberation. Mr. Whittlebury's prayers for a little extension of the prescribed time—at any rate until the search was completed—were scarcely listened to. Horace, to use his own words, longed to teach the rascals who was master, and who was man, and to give them a lesson upon rope-cutting and murder which should last them their lives. He was very sorry for

the fate of Caroline; but all the indulgence and concession in the world would not bring her to life again, and he was determined to have his revenge. Out they should all turn on the morrow, snow or no snow—ill or well;—out they should go, starve, and be——! It would do them good, the villains, and bring them to their senses a little! Horace wound up his violent diatribe by more than hinting, that a little more firmness on the part of Mr. Whittlebury would in all probability have been the means of saving the life of his daughter.

Mr. Whittlebury allowed his hot-headed partner to proceed without offering any further remark. His heart was too full of his loss to pay more than passing attention to Horace's various propositions for bringing the strike to a close. The conclusion of Horace's sentence, however, stung him to the quick; but a look of reproof was the only reply he could make: and Horace departed to his inn, to brood over his schemes of coercion and revenge. He had long determined upon this step—long wished for a sufficient excuse for "bringing the men to their senses,"—and was determined, now that one had at last offered, not to let it slip. Commiseration for his partner, or grief for the fate of Caroline, dwelt not in his heart, after the first effect of the shock was over. Upon the news reaching London, therefore, of the fatal catastrophe, he had set off, mentioning to Mr. Blink, in a casual way, his intention of visiting the works. To his surprise, that legal gentleman proposed to accompany him, having a little business, as he said, to transact in the neighbouring town of Fellborough; and so they came down together.

It struck Horace Chuck very forcibly upon the evening of their arrival, that his fellow-traveller, Mr. Jeremy Blink, was anything but a pleasant companion. He was sharp and snappish when spoken to, and applied himself more than necessary to the whisky-bottle—looked at his watch a great deal—inquired repeatedly about various conveyances to the coast—and, as the night grew older, seemed to grow paler and paler in the face, until Horace Chuck was induced to ask if he were unwell, so cadaverous and ghastly had he become.

"It is this confounded cigar!" said Mr. Blink, throwing one from him into the fire-grate. "I will just walk for half an hour—I do look queer, I dare say;" and he put on his hat and went to the door, which Boots was just fastening-up for the night. Looking out into the quiet town for a minute, he buttoned his coat, and went forward.

Passing down the high street at a gentle pace, and with the abstracted air of a man with nothing particular upon his mind, he turned

towards the lower town. The lighting by gas ceased at the corner, and the poorer streets, with all their haunts of villany and guilt, were left to themselves. The change in the lighting of the place was not more remarkable than the change in the gait and aspect of the solitary pedestrian: his pace, from a slow walk, suddenly increased to a brisk trot; and the expression of his countenance, from an unmeaning blank, became full of agitation and excitement. The further he went, the more speedy his pace became, until he turned into a narrow and dirty lane, in the most disreputable part of Welderton.

During his progress, he stopped several times, and listened. He fancied that he heard footsteps following closely upon him: he looked backward—but all seemed clear. He knew that he had not passed any one; and yet the sounds had fallen so distinctly upon his ear, that he could scarcely believe himself in error. He thought it might be the echo, and tried the effect of stamping loudly for half a dozen steps, but no echo answered the challenge. He then went on again with redoubled speed, but had not proceeded far before he felt satisfied that some one really was behind him. This did not exactly suit Mr. Jeremy Blink at the moment. He was abroad upon business strictly private: he therefore turned back for some distance;—but no person was to be seen. Even the watchman, lulled by the cold night, had forgotten his duty.

Proceeding onward again, better satisfied, he threaded one or two dirty and dark lanes, taking a circuitous course, purposely to trouble his follower—if follower there should be,—and at last stopped at the door of Old Joan Illfettle's deserted hovel. He tapped twice, and was at last admitted by a curious and unaccountable looking individual, with a wrinkled and villanous aspect, and a bullet-head, without hair or whiskers, and dressed in a sailor's old jacket.

"Lucky you're come!" said the fellow, closing the door behind Mr. Blink; "I am almost dead in this blessed old rat-hole!"

"Possibly so!" said Mr. Blink, with an assumption of calmness which but ill concealed his violent agitation. He then paused for a moment, and looking the bald individual very hard in the face, asked very significantly—"DONE?"

"Ah!" said the other, "you may say that! Done, both of 'em!"

"How was it?" was the reply. "I did not want *both* of them: but never mind."

"They fell into the 'Wash,' as they were crossing the plank!" said the bald man.

"Possibly so!" said Mr. Blink; "could not be better! But what the devil have you been at with yourself?—You'll bring the whole town about your heels."

"I shaved all my hair off. I mean to bolt the moment you cash up," said Red Bill—(for the bald individual was no other.) "I've got an old black wig—nobody will know me."

"You're a fool, Bill!" said Blink, with an air of extreme vexation; "an arrant fool! You never did a good thing yet, but you marred it by your cowardly caution."

"As how?" said Red Bill, looking about him. "Hush! I thought I heard the door shake."

"As how?—why, if the girls slipped off by accident, why can't you appear and say so, and not go skulking about, until your head is worth fifty guineas! and disguising yourself in such a fashion that everybody's attention must be drawn to you,—Where's Scrabbes?"

"Cut and run—gone to h——! for all I know. I kept him as long as I could," said the ruffian.

"Where's Old Joan, then?"

"Gone to the devil too! One of his messengers came for her in the Wren's Nest, two days ago."

"What do you mean?" said Blink.

"By G——! I hardly know myself! I saw—you know who—him that's been dead this twenty year—and he seemed to beckon me to follow him. Old Joan was there, and Scrabbes. I felt devilish queer, and fainted, I believe, or something very like it—and when I woke, Scrabbes and the old witch were gone."

"And so you thought it was his ghost, I suppose?" said Blink, with a sneer.

"What if I did?" said the other sullenly. "You've no call to sneer about it!—I've done the job, and I expect the payment!—If a man sells himself to the devil, he expects, at any rate, to have the cash down."

"Possibly so!" said Mr. Blink. "And, putting the compliment on one side, I don't think that you will get it yet. You must appear, Mr. Bill, and tell the tale of the accident. You must discover your old friend Scrabbes, and he must tell the same tale, too. All the country have been crying '*Murder!*' for these two days past,—that cry must be stopped—and stopped by you. Old Joan must be found, and, if she don't behave herself—*taken care of*; and then the one hundred is at your service, and not one moment before.—You understand me?"

"Bless'd if I do!—but I'll make you understand me, which will be

the same thing! Look, you," said Red Bill, rising, "Mr. Jeremy Blink, or Smith, or whatever you call yourself, I won't be played with,—when I found this matter out, and sent word to Old Silverwing, I didn't expect to have you coming this game over me,—if he didn't choose to believe what I said, why did he not come himself?"

"He didn't come, because he found it more convenient to stay away, and he didn't choose to believe you, because you told him a lie about this very same business in the outset, when the girl was born," replied Mr. Blink, in his usual quiet way. "You said the job was done then, and received your reward—had your discharge from the army, and were set upon your legs: and now, twenty years afterwards, you rip up the old story, and expect people to believe it without some little inquiry!"

"Well, you made the inquiry, and found it correct, didn't you?—and you made love to the girl too, didn't you, and wanted to marry her?—Damme! Old Silverwing would have heard a little of this affair, in a different way, I am thinking, if she had not told you to go about your business!" said the other. "And when you find you can't get her, you renew the bargain with me,—that if I get her well out of the way I shall have the money! And she is out of way—what the devil more do you want? I must have the money, and *will* have it, or I'll have something else out of you!" concluded the ruffian, in grumbling tones.

"Take care, Mr. Bill!—take care! I have your neck in a noose!" said Blink.

"The noose holds two, I am thinking," replied the other; "and I don't care if I do have first fall, as long as I bring you down along with me. Hark! what's that?"

"The rats nibbling away at the door, there," said Blink, somewhat startled.

"Rats don't gnaw at outer doors!" said Bill, warily approaching the crazy old door of the hovel, and suddenly throwing it open. A noise of rapidly retreating footsteps echoed through the silent and dark lane, but nobody was to be seen.

"I don't like this!" said Red Bill, gruffly, putting on his old black wig. "I must be off; there's mischief a-foot—I feel there is!"

"Look here!" said Blink, in some alarm, pointing to the door, and calling his attention to a hole evidently just opened between the two ill-joined planks of which it was formed. "Some peeping rascal has been at work here with his knife—the slit was not big enough for him, and he nanged to him!"

Red Bill immediately joined his companion, and upon perceiving the fresh opening, closed the door, and examined the steps.

"It may have been done some time," said he. "No—here are the chips and the sawdust, by G——! We have been seen and listened to, that's clear!—what's to be done?"

It immediately occurred to Blink that *he* had been standing with his back to the door the whole time, and was consequently safe from being identified.

"You may do as you like!" said Blink, walking towards the door. "I should advise you to stay and give the evidence I told you of. I am going over to Fellborough to-morrow, and shall not return for a week."

"You don't go without paying over my money!" said Red Bill, attempting to get between him and the doorway. But Mr. Blink was too quick for him: he slipped out, and slammed the door so violently, that it refused to open again for a minute or two. By the time Red Bill was able to follow, he felt that it was useless, and so stood and pondered for a moment, his countenance indexing the angry and fiendish passions which worked, like so many vipers, in his foul and festering heart. He clenched his hand hard, shook it in the direction taken by Blink, drew in his breath with a hissing sound, and also departed.

When Mr. Blink returned to the inn it was late, and he had to wait some little time under the portico, for the sleepy 'Boots' to open the door. Upon his entrance, he found Horace Chuck still up, and writing.

"Well, you don't look much the better for your walk," said Chuck, with his pen in his mouth, desisting for a moment to snuff the candles.

"Possibly so! But what the deuce are you writing about at this time of night, or rather morning?" said Blink, parrying the remark.

"We shall have a row, to-morrow, I expect," returned the other. "I am writing to the magistrates, and the officer of the dragoons at Fellborough. I have had a letter, since you left, thrown at me through a pane of glass, cautioning me against ejecting the fellows from Ironstone Place, and the houses about there, and threatening me with vengeance if I do. They have found out already that I am not such a soft-hearted old fool as my worthy Co."

"Do you really mean to turn 'em out to-morrow, then?"

"I am waiting for the troops to come over early, on purpose," replied Chuck, his eyes glistening with his anticipated triumph.

"I should advise you to take care of yourself, then, that's all!—These fellows are the veriest demons when roused, that ever rode rough-shod over a town or a man either," said Blink. "Precious stifling your room is—may I open the door?"

"Yes, if you like."

Blink opened the door, which communicated with the passage. Just as he did so, he heard the bolts and chains of the hall-door again at work, as if closing up again, after the entrance of another late rambler. Acutely alive to every circumstance bearing upon his situation, he listened for a moment, and then went into the passage, and peeped over the banister with a restless curiosity, and saw Mr. Thomas Racquet, much heated, and splashed with mud from head to foot.

"What the devil!" said he to himself, turning suddenly away, so as to avoid being observed by the party now ascending the stairs. "That fellow here!—he must have followed me to some purpose this time!" And then the thought of the old door at Joan Illfettle's flashed across his memory, and he stood hesitating and uncertain, with the handle of the lock in his hand.

"Why don't you come in?" shouted Chuck, in ill-natured tones. "Why, what on earth's the matter with you? You look worse than ever!—What a fool you are to do it, if it don't agree with you!—Go to bed, do!—there's your candle."

Mr. Blink lit his candle, with a constrained attempt at coolness, and then departed, leaving Chuck so absorbed in his plans for the morrow, that he scarcely noticed his parting "Good night!"

When Mr. Blink had reached his room, he sat upon the side of the bed, biting his nails, and pondering for some time. The sudden appearance of Tom Racquet in the very house with him, had perplexed him sadly; and the idea that he might have been watched by that gentleman, and followed to the house of Old Joan, and overheard in his conversation with Red Bill, totally overthrew all his previous plans, and at once determined him to quit Welderton with all speed.

Aunt Lucy—who still resided at the inn—was startled from her repose the next morning, by a loud rattling of horses' feet in front of the house, and clanking of metal, and loud bawling and knocking. Peeping from one side of the blinds, she beheld six or seven dragoons walking their horses about, and seemingly waiting with no little impatience for admittance; her heart told her at once that this was the morning upon which was to be tried the vital question with the miners, of who was to be master and who was to be man, however unjust and

tyrannical the proceedings of the master might have been. She had had, since the day of her visit to Mrs. Shrinkinwood, two secret country walks with Old Mr. Whittlebury, and had heard much during these rambles respecting the dispute with the workpeople, and had also flown to his side the instant the sad news reached her of the murder at the mine: she was therefore rather glad than dismayed at these signs of precaution, and proceeded to dress herself forthwith.

Tom, however, came to her long before she was ready, and was so importunate for admittance, that Aunt Lucy pinned herself into her great shawl, and allowed him entrance.

"I have found that villain Blink; I saw him go out of the inn last night, while I was smoking a cigar by the side door," said Tom, entering on tiptoe, and whispering—"I followed him to a rascally little hole in a dirty lane in the lower part of the town, and heard him and a bald scoundrel, whose face I shall know again, talking about poor Caroline and Miss Grey. They have murdered them somehow together;—I'll tell you more presently, but I must be gone to the next magistrate, and have him apprehended, I shall not have time to get over to the Colonel's."

"Oh, Tom! why did you not go last night?"

"It was past four this morning when I saw him enter this house," said Tom, "for I watched him every step; I went to one gentleman, but he was away about the anticipated riot of to-day, and I was obliged to come back again. However, I have been at his door all night, so that I am certain he is safe. 'Boots' has gone for an officer."

"Dear! dear!" said Aunt Lucy. "I hope they will catch the villain; I am as grieved for those two poor girls, Tom, as if they had been my own daughters. I saw them both, and took quite a fancy to them, poor things, from a little kindness they did me the other day; and poor Mr. Whittlebury, says he shall never know happiness again in this world, and raves, and goes on so piteously." Aunt Lucy could get no further, but began to sob and hide her face in her handkerchief, as if her heart would break. "I have been helping him all I could," concluded the good-natured lady at last.

"That was right, Aunty," said Tom, in his natural voice, which sounded quite startling from the contrast, he having all along spoken in a hurried whisper. "That was right, and just like yourself. As to the two poor girls, I cannot believe that they are dead; I have a sort of feeling—a presentiment, or whatever you call it—that that old hag and Blink have got hold of them for some evil purpose or other.

Consider," and Tom dropped all at once into his old argumentative attitude, one hand extended to catch the finger of the other as it dropped, with the conclusion of every sentence, into its palm—"consider, nothing was found at the shaft, indicating death by the fall; the old hag's own words, that the *fall* did not kill them; my finding the handkerchief a little way from the place, indicated a movement of some sort——"

"They might have been carried," suggested Aunt Lucy.

"No, no," said Tom; "at any rate they were safe from the fall. Now comes the drowning."

"Good Heavens! Thomas, how can you talk so coolly!"

"I always find myself steadiest and coolest in an emergency," said Tom. "Colonel Grey says that the water is not above four feet deep; this is not enough to suffocate either of them, if they had but the presence of mind to keep their feet. The plank which crossed the stream is missing; that cannot have gone off by itself. The old woman's clothes were so wet when I first saw her in the mine, that it is next to impossible to believe but that they must have received other wetting besides the dripping from the rocks: she is also missing, but how she got out of the mine is a mystery. Altogether, I never will believe that the poor girls are gone, until I see them cold and dead before me. I will tear up every rock and stone in those dark works, until I find some clue to this villanous business."

Tom and his Aunt had worked themselves up to such a pitch of excitement, that they had not perceived the entrance of the chambermaid.

"Please, sir, 'Boots' and the ossifer is outside, and they are waiting; and they say that No. 10 is gone off out of his winder," said the chambermaid, out of breath with her run up stairs, and palpitating with the interest of her information.

The news was too true.

Mr. Blink had waited until the morning had dawned, and finding himself watched at his bed-room door, had opened the window and dropped quietly on to the lawn at the back of the house, carefully leaving the amount of his bill and a gratuity to the servants behind him, in order to lull suspicion at the abruptness of his early departure, and had made the best of his way from Welderton.

CHAPTER XXVII.

INDICATIONS OF A RIOT.

THE visit of the officer in search of Mr. Blink, the arrival of the dragoons, and the preparations making by Mr. Chuck for his morning's campaign with the miners, had created so much bustle in the inn, that by six o'clock all the inhabitants were on the alert. The towns people also were on foot, and full of excitement; many of the shopkeepers seeing parties of determined-looking fellows perambulating the streets, preparatory to holding a grand conference just outside of the town, did not take down their shutters at the usual time, but waited to see how matters were likely to turn out; the magistrates were assembled at the 'George' to breakfast, and everything was ready to suppress at a moment's notice any outrage upon the public peace.

The disappointment to Tom in losing his captive, after having all but fairly secured him, was excessive: he, however, went to the 'George' immediately, and recounted his adventures, and was highly complimented by the authorities upon his perseverance in tracing so suspicious a character, and a warrant was immediately issued for the apprehension of Mr. Blink.

Horace Chuck was so much engaged, that he did not miss his companion. By eight o'clock, he had had a disagreeable altercation with his partner respecting the measures he had adopted for the reconciliation of the miners, and had at last left him with the determination to act upon his own responsibility, and carry through his coercive measures at once.

Mr. Whittlebury was so absorbed in the fate of his daughter, that the differences with the men ceased to interest him further than as they were concerned with that painful circumstance. Two whole days had now elapsed, and no tidings had been received of any of the parties concerned in that dreadful tragedy, and the third day, upon which he had hoped to have had the new shaft rope rove to its gear, was in all probability to be spent in bloodshed and quarrelling with the very people upon whom he relied for assistance.

"I will have," said the old gentleman, "a few fresh hands at any rate, to get the engine to work, and the rope in its place, if the present hands refuse: that will not interfere with the strike; and I, and Tom, and Ewbank, and the Colonel, will again search the place from end to end. I cannot live in the present uncertainty."

Mr. Whittlebury put on his hat, and proceeded to the works: the rope he knew would be now lying there ready for use.

A large meeting of the miners had been convened, and they were assembled on the neighbouring ground. A general hoot and a storm of hisses saluted him upon his appearance.

He beckoned to Ewbank, who was perched upon a large stone, haranguing the mob.

The young miner, however, finished his speech before attending to the signal, and then jumped off the stone under a salute of hearty cheers, and joined Mr. Whittlebury.

"Ewbank!" said the old gentleman, a little nervously, "I want a few hands to get the new rope up; I am determined to visit the works with a party, and search more thoroughly."

"I am afraid, sir, we can't touch it," replied Ewbank.

"Not touch it! why do you mean to put the life of a fellow-creature in the balance against the paltry consideration of a few pence advance of wages?"

"Not at all, sir; there is not one amongst us but would set to work directly if it was of any use. I've searched the place myself, as you know, and no one is there; besides, by a motion of the Union, carried this morning, we are determined to stand out, and not put a hand to anything until our just claims are admitted; but I'll try, if you like. I always liked *you*, Mr. Whittlebury, and so do all of us; but as to the other, why — that's all." And Ewbank nodded significantly, and went to the crowd, who were standing in little groups. A general buzzing soon announced that his proposition was under consideration; the buzzing grew louder and louder for a minute or two, until, upon Mr. Whittlebury walking towards the spot, it suddenly burst out into an angry storm of "*Noes*," yells, and hisses.

Mr. Whittlebury, now angry in his turn, walked towards the engine-house, but was stopped at the doorway by two men.

"You can't enter here, sir," said the fellows.

"Not enter my own premises!" said the old gentleman, in angry astonishment.

"Don't exactly know about that, sir; our orders from the council are not to let any one to the engine, and we mean to abide by them."

"My good fellows, you are acting both foolishly and wrongly; I must and *will* enter my own house, if I am obliged to bring a troop of horse at my heels to help me. You had better leave."

The two fellows, however, remained firm to their posts, and Mr

Whittlebury returned to the town, incensed as much against his partner, whose presence and harsh measures had brought matters to this crisis, as against the men themselves.

He immediately gathered a few stout fellows belonging to another concern in the neighbourhood, and who had not joined the union, and who were willing to help him to get the rope into its place, provided they were not called upon to do anything else. Attended by these and a few constables, he again approached the works.

His re-appearance upon the ground was the signal for a general groan from the excited mob. A few stones were thrown, but no further violence offered.

The constables then demanded admittance from the two door-keepers, and being refused, seized them, and attempted to take them into custody.

A general movement immediately took place among their assembled comrades; with one loud hurra they rushed down upon the constables, and a smart battle ensued for possession of the prisoners. Mr. Whittlebury mounted himself upon a piece of stone, and tried to be heard; he was soon thrown from his elevated position, and trampled upon, and hustled and tossed about in the now angry crowd like a ship on a heavy sea: all his endeavours to lull the storm were drowned by the groans and hisses of those around him, and by the cheers of the party who had succeeded in rescuing their fellow-workmen from the hands of the constables.

The sudden appearance of a troop of dragoons, with Colonel Grey and the other magistrates at their head, did not tend to increase the peaceable disposition of the growling mob.

The soldiers halted and sheathed their sabres at command of their captain; and the magistrates rode forward towards the engine-house, which was now the centre of the movement, and called upon the people to disperse: they were answered by shouts of "Our rights and liberties!"—"Fair day's wage for a fair day's work!"—"No lobsters!"—"Down with the tyrants!"—and other favourite flowers of mob oratory.

Colonel Grey then looked at his watch, and gave the men ten minutes to disperse:—and there they stood, the military waiting with professional *nonchalance* for the fray which they saw would soon commence, and the miners, like some angry animals which only wanted the excuse of provocation to turn and tear.

During this unnatural and threatening calm, two horsemen joined

the mob, at a gallop ;—the first, Tom Racquet, rode directly to where Mr. Whittlebury was standing, and begged him to leave the ground, as his presence only tended to inflame the passions of the men. The old gentleman immediately took Tom's advice, mounted his proffered horse, and after speaking a word or two with Colonel Grey, rode off amidst the furious yelling and hooting of the rioters.

The other rider, whose face could not very distinctly be recognised in consequence of his hat having been shaken over his eyes, by the violence of his gallop, came madly forward, running over one man, and almost riding down the magistrate, before he pulled up ; the awkwardness of his appearance, and the evidently painful difficulty he evinced in keeping his seat, raised a hearty laugh at his expense from the mob, which was grimly joined in by the statue-like soldiery : the moment, however, he felt his hands sufficiently at liberty to raise his hat, the most terrific yell that ever burst from mortal throats shook the air.

"Chuck! Chuck! Down with the tyrant!" cried the mob.

"You had better leave the ground, sir," said Colonel Grey, leaning from his horse.

"I shall not leave the ground, sir!—the ground is my own," returned Horace.

"I must take upon myself to order you off, sir," said the Colonel, "if you are likely to become the immediate cause of a breach of the peace."

A stone, evidently meant for the person of the unpopular Horace, struck his horse. The animal, not liking the salute, became very restive, and employed his rider so ridiculously in keeping his seat, that the mob tried the effect of another—and another—accompanying each with shouts of derision at his awkward attempts at horsemanship.

Colonel Grey, with his watch in his hand, now rode forward, and held it up. A shout of defiance was the answer. He then, in sonorous tones, commenced reading the riot act.

This seemed the signal for a movement. The crowd fell back yelling, and several heavy bludgeons and armed staves, which had been evidently hidden in the dresses of the rioters until this moment, became suddenly visible. The riot act was finished, and the troop of dragoons moved forward. A broad, bright, and sudden flash through the whole line proclaimed that their swords were drawn ; and they halted again. Their officer then rode forward with the intention

of speaking. He was saluted with a shower of stones, which caused an evident sensation among his men. He shook his head, sheathed his sword, and rode a little further forward. Another shower came rattling about his ears. He turned half round to his men—laid his hand gradually upon the hilt of his sword, as if he wished the rioters to see and profit by the delay—drew it gently from its scabbard—and then gave the fatal word—"Charge !"

A tremendous shower of brickbats and missiles of all descriptions assailed the troops as they rode smartly forward. The flat of the sabre, however, applied pretty freely about the heads and shoulders of the most obstinate of the mob, soon made an impression; and after five minutes' work the meeting had dispersed. The duties of the military, however, were not finished. A party of the miners, who had detached themselves from the main body at the commencement of the row, had entered the town, and succeeded, in the teeth of the civil power, in breaking open a gunsmith's shop, and getting possession of many rifles and pistols, and some powder.

This intelligence, which was brought by a breathless constable, divided the military force. Half was sent back immediately into the town, to prevent further mischief, and the other remained to prevent damage to the works. The state of the lower part of the town, after the rencontre, was very threatening. Large bodies of men were collected in the narrow streets, talking together, in a low, grumbling, and determined tone; several of the spirit-shops were ransacked, and much damage done. As the dusk of evening approached, these meetings dispersed—but with a hollow murmur, like that which sometimes sounds along the sea before a storm.

The darkness of the evening was increased by the heavy clouds which had been gathering all the morning. A cold and piercing wind began to sweep the street, and whistle and roar among the roofs of the rickety dwellings; and the snow, which had fallen partially all day began to come down plentifully, eddying and whirling to the ground. The attempt to dislodge the miners from Ironstone Place had been abandoned until the next day. Horace Chuck, in the *mêlée*, had been unhorsed, and severely beaten.

The miners, however, were ignorant of this decision, and as the evening approached, became more savage, gloomy, and determined. A large party, which had collected at one of the spirit-shops, became drunk; and, taking it into their heads that the attempt to dislodge them was delayed merely to make their punishment the more severe,

by turning their families out at *night*, determined to be beforehand with the authorities.

They reeled, drunken and shouting, from the house, and made their way through holes and alleys, where the dragoons could not act, until they reached Ironstone Place. Here they called upon such of the inhabitants as still remained in the houses to come out. Many of them did so, thinking that Chuck and his posse had at last arrived. The two dragoons who had to patrol the narrow street were driven from it, much hurt. A spirit-shop was broken open in a moment, and, in the hurry and drunken confusion, set on fire.

"Why not fire the whole place?" shouted one of the rioters; "and then Chuck may come as soon as he likes!"

This proposal, so genial to the savage temper of the mob, was received with loud shouts: the little furniture of the houses was quickly removed by the light of the burning spirit-shop, and placed in safety; and the work of destruction commenced. House after house was emptied, and fired from top to bottom. In a few minutes the dense and stifling smoke came beating down, and, mingling with the snow-flakes, filled the street to suffocation; but still the maddened and shouting mob went on.

The whole of the lower town was soon roused by the light of the burning street. Reports of the harsh proceedings of Messrs. Whittlebury and Chuck flew in all directions, until, with volleys of bitter curses upon both partners, the major part of the meeting of the morning again collected, resolved to pay those gentlemen a visit at their own homes. Onward rolled the howling mob, carrying their flaming torches towards the upper town, driving all before them, breaking open shops, and increasing as they went, until they reached the bridge which connected the two divisions of the town. Here they separated, one party making immediately for the gas-works, and the other proceeding onwards. Aunt Lucy and Tom, who had joined Mr. Whittlebury at Mrs. Shrinkinwood's soon after the riot had commenced, were standing on the roof of that lady's house, watching the progress of the distant fire, and insensible to the roar of the careering wind, and to the snow which was falling fast around them. Mr. Whittlebury wrung his hands bitterly as he saw the flames increasing and leaping from house to house, and glowing and brightening against the lurid night clouds, but said nothing.

"What is the meaning of that dull, humming noise?" said Aunt

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Lucy, listening attentively, and calling their attention to a low murmur, which seemed to rise and fall in the distance.

"I am afraid that it is a signal that the mob are coming this way," said Mr. Whittlebury. "If so, Heaven preserve us!"

Aunt Lucy said nothing, but moved closer to the side of Mr. Whittlebury, leaving Tom to himself.

"I will go down and see," said Tom, hastily; "I will return in a minute."

Tom hastened down into the street, and was soon satisfied of the serious nature of the riot. Numbers of the people were flying in all directions, and making the best of their way out of the town. A troop of horse rode rapidly through the streets, in the direction of the fire. Suddenly, to Tom's utter dismay, every gas-light in the place was extinguished, and all was darkness, save the red glare of the heavens.

Tom was hastening on for information, when he suddenly met Mrs. Shrinkinwood, in her little gig, endeavouring, in vain, to persuade the imperturbable 'Gustavus' to mend his pace. That good lady had been out to see how matters were going on; and finding so many of her neighbours flying from the scene, had hastened round by the stables, and harnessed her horse with her own fair hands, intending to follow their example. Her house, she knew, as the residence of Mr. Whittlebury, would be one of the first which would fall a prey to the savage rage of the mob.

Tom hailed her, and asked for information.

"They have destroyed the gas-works, and are now ransacking the Fleece," said Mrs. Shrinkinwood, tugging away at the reins, to make 'Gustavus' understand that he was to stop. (The 'Fleece' was the inn at which Horace Chuck, Tom, and Aunt Lucy had been staying.) "The lower town is all on fire!—Colonel Grey has been nearly killed by a pistol-shot,—the other magistrates have run away, and the military do not know what to do,—the officers say they cannot act without their authority, and the place is given over to fire and pillage. We must lose no time—jump into the gig—Mr. Whittlebury, and all of us, had better escape before the mob comes up."

"You get on with the chaise," said Tom, "while I run to the end of the street,—if I mistake not, there is a house on fire there also;" and, in spite of Mrs. Shrinkinwood's remonstrances, Tom ran on.

Mrs. Shrinkinwood put 'Gustavus' in motion again, and in due time arrived at her own door.

Tom's suspicions were well-founded. Upon arriving at the end of Hill Street, the scene of destruction came fully within his view. Furniture and pictures were piled together in the roadway and fired; bottles and barrels, with crowds of drunken and maddened wretches dancing and screaming around them, stood in various directions. In one part a quantity of spirits, which had escaped from a broken cask, was dammed up in the gutter, from which the mob were drinking it by means of their hands—some lying down at full length, and filling themselves like beasts of the field.

The troop which Tom had seen ride down the street were drawn up opposite the rioters. The officers, perplexed at the absence of the magistrates, and fearing to take the responsibility upon themselves, were collected together in anxious conversation. The mob, emboldened by this state of affairs, and furious with the drink they had imbibed, talked of nothing but plundering the whole town. House after house was forced and fired, pistol and gunshots exchanged, and every horror that the human mind could invent perpetrated, before any one in authority could be found to put a stop to the proceedings.

The officers, finding that the whole town would probably fall a victim to the flames, ventured at last to charge. They were instantly fired upon by the rioters, and lost several of their men; heavy tables and chests of drawers were flung out of the windows upon their heads, and the battle became general. As fast as the mob were cut down and trampled upon by the military in one place, they started up in another, more bloodthirsty, savage, and indomitably obstinate than ever.

The ringing of the fire-arms, clashing of the sabres, shouting and yelling of the mob, the crackling and bursting of the burning timbers proclaimed that the riot was at its height. A sudden cry of "Hill Street, Hill Street," rose from the crowd, as they gave way at last before the repeated charges of the dragoons.

Tom, who had seen all we have described in the glance of a minute, waited for no further intimation of the mob's intentions, but set off with the utmost speed to get his aunt and Mr. Whittlebury out of the way; his precaution was, however, lost. Upon his arrival within sight of the door, he found it shattered to atoms, and another mob in complete possession of the house. Here the same savage revelry was being enacted over again; the wine-cellar had been forced, and the house fired. Tom suddenly found himself awkwardly placed; he was between the two mobs, with no chance of escape, and several parties

to whom he applied for admittance flatly refused him, fearing to open their doors.

The military again charged furiously up the street, and Tom saw several dragoon horses without their riders.

Escaping with difficulty from a cut aimed at him by a tall soldier, Tom returned to the end of Hill Street, hoping to escape through the stable-yard of the Fleece; but the attempt was useless; the walls of the house had fallen, and buried in their scathing ruins some dozens of the insensate beasts who had caused their destruction. The fire, smoke, and choking clouds of dust which beset him on every side, rendered Tom almost as mad as the demons by whom he was surrounded. Again was he nearly cut down by the same tall dragoon who had charged him before. Tom knew it was useless to complain, so fell, to avoid the blow; the soldier stooped from his horse, and made a stab at him.

Tom immediately recognised the features of the dissipated Dick Gardner, late of Coddlethorpe, and called to him by name; the soldier, however, spurred his horse, and rode furiously on, fleshing his red blade deeply into the shoulders and heads of all within his reach. In spite of all the military could do, and although the streets were strewed with the wounded and dying, still the mob held their deadly and tremendous power; the flashing of the forked flames, and the yelling of the agonised wretches dying in the boiling lead which had been melted from the house-tops, were not abated for an instant; and it was not until day began to break that any cessation seemed to take place. The soldiers, fagged and jaded, and many of them as drunk as the rioters, still rode fiercely up and down the streets, dispersing the stragglers, and endeavouring to stay the progress of the fire.

Tom, who had risen to his feet, sorely trampled upon and bruised, and with a painful stab in the neck from the sword of Young Gardner, was making the best of his way out of the town, when he perceived his ragged little guide of the day before bleeding from a severe cut across the head, and lying in company with some half naked men and women, upon the curb-stone, drinking the contents of the gutter by the help of one hand, while the other was employed in holding a piece of old carpet to his wound.

The moment the half-tipsy urchin perceived Tom, he grinned and staggered towards him.

"I say, sir, I know where she's hid the two dead ladies," said the little fellow, with a revolting leer.

"What do you say, you young rascal?" said Tom, seizing him by the arm.

"Old Joan thrashed me for priggin' Bill's wittals, so I told her I'd tell, I did," said the boy, reeling—"I told her I'd tell, and I will; I know where she put 'em."

"Put what, you young scoundrel?" said Tom, shaking him.

"The two ladies as she lugged out o' the Wash," said the boy; "but come, I say, don't pinch quite so fierce, if you please."

Tom, in the excitement of the moment, had seized the young drinker very tightly, struck with his intelligence, and had compressed his arm more than he intended; the little fellow, finding that remonstrance had no effect upon his captor, took to biting and struggling violently, and calling out at the same time with thick and drunken utterance for rescue.

"Tell me where she put them," said Tom, at last, "and I will let you loose."

The little fellow was, however, by this time too far gone for Tom to understand distinctly what he meant; his speech failed him, and he fell from Tom's grasp drunk into the gutter. Tom seeing a blue lambent flame flashing and playing along the swollen stream, raised the boy to his shoulder, and carried him off, determined to keep him until his returning senses should enable him to explain more fully the import of his words.

With a heavy feeling Tom pursued his way over hot ruins, and passed houses tottering to their fall, until he found himself in the open country.

Tom made for the works, hoping, yet scarcely knowing why, that he should there meet with somebody who could give him information relative to the retreat of Mr. Whittlebury. In this, however, he was disappointed; the works were deserted, and he sat down in the engine-house parched with thirst, and almost fainting from the loss of blood arising from the wound in his neck. He placed his heavily breathing burthen carefully upon some straw, and watched the increasing day-light.

Morning broke over the town of Welderton, and the riot, more from the exhaustion of the mob than from any other cause, at last gave way. The black and smoking ruins, partly burning and partly covered with snow, tottered on every side. The streets were deserted by all but the military; the inhabitants had taken refuge in the churches and more distant suburbs.

The "Fleece," lately the most dashing of inns, was now but a heap

of smouldering timber, rendering a large part of the street impassable; under its piles of scorching stone and brick lay charred to cinders several of the wretched beings who had fallen in their drink the night before; round the edge of the pile of rubbish also lay the remains of human creatures, literally boiled in the burning fluid which had either escaped from the place, or been wantonly scattered into the streets during the fire. There they lay, with their faces hidden in the kennel, swollen and soddened masses of human flesh! for hours no one approached, or seemed to think of rescuing any who might still happen to be alive. The dead and the drunken lay across each other in the snow, while the dull heavy sound of the horses' feet, as the military patrol paced up and down, was the only sound which disturbed the quiet of the melancholy place.

As the morning advanced, signs of life were evinced by many of the prostrate wretches, and groans and screams of agony rang upon the sharp and biting air. Many who had fallen from intoxication sound and whole, woke that morning from their treacherous dream maimed for life.

By degrees the inhabitants began with startled gaze to appear at their doors, and inquire of each other the extent of the damage. The "Fleece" and all the houses adjoining were destroyed; the whole of one side of Hill Street, and part of the opposite, had fallen a victim to the flames. The jail was broken, the gas-works destroyed, and the greater part of the lower town in ashes, besides the loss of life, which was terrible.

By twelve o'clock in the day the magistrates and town council were again assembled, each with a ready excuse for his absence the night before, and report was brought of the state of Colonel Grey. He was not considered in any danger, although badly wounded.

With an alacrity, which was meant to make amends for past indecision, orders were given to clear the ruined streets; the wounded were removed to the infirmary, the drunken imprisoned, and the dead and the remains of those burnt by the hot lead and spirit, and crushed and mangled by the falling timbers and stone-work, cared for in the various churches, and thus ended the Welderton riots.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE FLIGHT, AND THE MOUNTAIN STORM.

MR. WHITTLEBURY and Aunt Lucy were just preparing to descend from the roof of Mrs. Shrinkinwood's house, alarmed at the increasing noise and the signs of fire so very near them, when that lady's head became visible through the little trap-door which opened on to the leads.

"Come down, Mr. Whittlebury! Come away at once—the rioters are coming up the street! I have got the gig at the back door; and we will cross to Fellborough at once. They talk about hanging you and Mr. Chuck up to the lamp-iron, if they can but catch you!"

This last was an addition of Mrs. Shrinkinwood's own imagination: reports, and stories of all kinds, never lost anything by passing through that good lady's hands.

"I will not move one step!" said the old gentleman, now thoroughly roused. "The scoundrels, who have robbed me of my poor girl, may take me if they please. I have nothing further to live for; and have but one last wish—to brain the first of the miscreants that steps over this door stone!"

The shouts of the rioters, who had by this time assembled outside the house, were so violent that the party inside could scarcely hear themselves speak; and the smashing of the glass proclaimed that the attack had commenced. Mr. Whittlebury was almost forced down the stairs by the two ladies, and, after most urgent entreaties, persuaded to leave the house by the garden. Just as he had done so, the front door flew to shatters and the mob entered in search of him.

Mrs. Shrinkinwood, Aunt Lucy, and the old gentleman, then commenced their retreat, lighted across the snow by the red glare from their own dwelling, which was soon on fire from the cellar to the attic. 'Gustavus,' for once in his life, gave signs of sympathy with his mistress's distresses, by actually setting off at a gallop; and they were soon out of the reach of danger.

"How long will it take to reach Fellborough?" asked Aunt Lucy, shivering with the cold,—for in their hurry she had departed without her shawl. Mr. Whittlebury too had lost his hat.

"Two hours," said Mrs. Shrinkinwood, "if the road is good. But the way lies directly over the Hawksfell Pikes, and the snow may trouble us a little."

"Hawksfell Pikes!" said Mr. Whittlebury; "why we shall never get over that tremendous road through all this wind and storm."

The lady however protested that she knew the road perfectly, and that with the morning's light they should be able to distinguish the way very well. Mr. Whittlebury, unable to argue the question, cared not which way they took, or what fate befel him; and, rendered selfish by the extremity of his grief, almost forgot the two shivering females whose fate was now bound up with his own.

As they proceeded on their way, they saw the snow lying in heavy wreaths upon the hill sides, swept up by the fury of the wind.

Their road lay through a long tract of upland, now scarcely distinguishable from the bog and morass with which it was skirted on either side; but Mrs. Shrinkinwood was determined to proceed. Aunt Lucy, who suffered from the cold very severely, questioned the propriety of going forward with so little light and over such precarious ground; but as Mr. Whittlebury, to whom more than to the driver her appeal was addressed, did not answer, she sat, silent and fearful, gazing into the gloom around her, and expecting every instant to be whelmed into some deep cavity.

'Gustavus' soon began to feel the rise of the road, as it wound among the crags at the foot of the Hawksfell Pikes, and came to his usual walk.

The light of the morning found them half-way up the steep and rocky way which crossed the mountain, when 'Gustavus,' from the heavy state of the road, and from finding himself suddenly up to his knees in snow, came to a stand-still; and Mrs. Shrinkinwood evinced evident signs of having lost her way. Heavy and dark loomed the immense masses of rock which surrounded them, and heavier and darker frowned the lofty Pikes themselves, while the neighbouring mountains of Blackfell and Heatherbrow reared their scathed and gloomy heads far into the deep grey sky; the wind, which had been boisterous all the night, seemed to wake up to fresh fury as the daylight broke, and came careering down the mountain sides in tremendous gusts, baring the heads of the rocks, and driving the snow before it in huge heaps.

"It is impossible to get on," said Aunt Lucy; "we must return at once, or we shall be lost!"

Mr. Whittlebury—who had until now remained almost stupified with the weight of woe which had so suddenly been heaped upon his head—roused himself again, and after getting out, and scrambling up

to his middle in the snow, discovered that a sudden dip in the mountain road had become filled with a drift, into which they had sunk over the tops of the wheels, and that a retreat was as impossible as an advance.

Mr. Whittlebury's first care was to endeavour to get the two ladies a little off the road, so as to be under the lee of a gigantic rock, which seemed from its structure to have been hurled at some distant period from the adjacent mountain. Here, sheltered in some measure from the wind, they resolved to await succour, judging that the high road between Welderton and Fellborough could not be long without a traveller.

Mrs. Shrinkinwood had, however, in the darkness of the night, taken the old or upper road, now scarcely or ever used except by a few shepherds who tended their flocks upon the higher regions of the Pikes. 'Gustavus' was loosed from the chaise, and after one or two clumsy flounders in the snow, stood still; and thus they remained, watching the driving clouds as they rolled their lead-coloured forms down the mountain sides, and listening to the terrific gusts of the mountain wind, wailing and bellowing among the jagged heads of rock with a deep full thunder which not even the sea in its most awful moments could equal.

A long, flat, white cloud, like a sheet of ice, seemed all of a sudden to form and fix itself upon its edge, along the ridge of Blackfell and the neighbouring elevations; the instant its bold broad front met the gaze of Mrs. Shrinkinwood, she screamed with terror.

"The Helm! the Helm! I know it's the Helm! Good heavens! we shall all be blown over the crags!"

"Lie down under the rock, close," said Whittlebury, in an instant, "it is our only chance of safety."

"See! see! there is the Bar!" said Mrs. Shrinkinwood, pointing to another white cloud opposite to the Helm, about half-a-mile from the mountain, and called the Helm-Bar, from a supposition that its presence in some measure controls the fury of the coming storm.

The sky was visible between these two extraordinary clouds, and many specks and loose vapours, detached from their edges, were flying with amazing velocity in contrary directions.

Suddenly the Helm-Bar, with a tremulous motion, began to disperse. Mrs. Shrinkinwood immediately laid herself down under the rock, pulling Aunt Lucy upon her. Mr. Whittlebury had scarcely time to follow their example before the terrific and all-dreaded Helm-

wind burst thundering forth. Gust after gust swept, tearing along the mountain sides with an awful and tremendous roar; nothing withstood its shock; masses of granite were thrown from their beds, and hurled, leaping down into the stream below. The sides of the hills were cleared of snow, and the whole mass sent flying into the valley; even the huge fragment upon which the travellers had depended for safety rocked upon its basis, and seemed almost ready to follow its lesser brethren down the declivity. The cold of that freezing hurricane was intense. Poor Aunt Lucy, who had persuaded herself that a 'draft' from an open window was the *acme* of danger, shivered from its painfully deadening effects, and all but fainted with terror.

Suddenly the snow about the spot upon which they were lying was lifted into the air, and with one roaring whirl carried far down the mountain side. Mr. Whittlebury, at imminent hazard, glanced round the rock; the road was clear as if it had been swept; 'Gustavus' and the gig were both gone; the horse, however, with that instinct which teaches animals the approach of danger, had taken refuge under a rock, and had escaped the peril.

The piercing blast still rushed over them in long monotonous howls although some hours had now elapsed since the storm had commenced. The cowering and fearful travellers at last began to feel that irresistible sensation of drowsiness which always succeeds long exposure to the elements. Aunt Lucy sank exhausted, and Mrs. Shrinkinwood and Mr. Whittlebury, who were both better clad, and had been more inured to the mountain air, were fast giving way.

By degrees, however, the wind lulled, and Mr. Whittlebury went out to reconnoitre. The face of the country was so entirely changed by the drifting of the snow, that he did not know it again; large hillocks had been removed, and hollows filled up, in the few hours of the storm; the road over which they had travelled was not visible, nothing remained as he had originally seen it, but the stern granite mountains which lay piled around the scene.

The heart of the old gentleman sank within him as he thought of the probable fate of his companions; he turned back and told the result of his examination.

"We are crag-fast, then," said Mrs. Shrinkinwood, in dismay, "and must remain until we are either starved or frozen to death."

Poor Mr. Whittlebury said nothing, but tried all in his power to comfort his companions in danger; but it soon became evident that he stood as much in need of comfort as either of them. The drowsiness

which had fallen over Aunt Lucy fell upon him, and he sat down, leaned against the rock, and prepared for sleep. Mrs. Shrinkinwood screamed in his ears, shook him by the shoulders, pinched him, and did all she could to keep him awake: the case was hopeless—the sensation was overpowering, and he slept. Mrs. Shrinkinwood was alone in that wild mountain region: she ran from under the shelter of the rock, and in defiance of the wind, which still blew with great fury, attempted to descend the side of the mountain to where she perceived the new or lower road lay.

One or two dangerous slips into deep holes, filled with the treacherous snow, soon convinced her of the madness of the undertaking, and she returned to share the fate of her companions.

During that stormy morning, and long before the town of Welderton was again under the entire control of the magistrates, reports reached the inhabitants of the ravages of the Helm-wind. Several persons had lost all their sheep from the upland pastures, others had had their sheds levelled with the ground. An old shepherd, who had been in the habit of frequenting the fells, brought intelligence of the shattered remains of a chaise, which had evidently been blown over the crags from the old road into the valley below.

From his description of the vehicle, and also from the circumstance of Mrs. Shrinkinwood having been seen the evening before driving out of the town, no doubt was entertained but that the ill-fated gig must have belonged to that lady; and from the situation in which it was found, but little hope could be entertained for the safety of the fair owner.

The news of the death of Mrs. Shrinkinwood soon reached Horace Chuck. Anxiety for the fate of his partner was the first feeling which took possession of his heart, for he knew that he had fled with her in the gig, accompanied by another lady.

The second thought, and by far the most predominant one, was, that the Wren's-nest Works, and all the property thereunto appertaining, together with much other, both funded and landed, could with very little management now be made his own. Mr. Whittlebury was dead—old people cannot stand snow-storms. There was not exactly a feeling of gladness playing round his heart, but there certainly was but little feeling of sorrow. Caroline too—she who would by right have been her father's heiress, had been called to her long home—again, he was not exactly glad; and yet, to say he was grieved at finding so serious an impediment to his possessing himself of the

coveted property removed, would be sadly belying his thoroughly mercantile heart.

And thus he lay upon his sofa, and plotted and planned the accumulation of wealth, while death in various horrid forms was busy about him. The noise of the charging troops; the screams and imprecations of the maddened populace; the rushing of the flames; the howling of the wind; the pain of his own hurts, scarcely turned his thoughts for one moment from the glittering channel down which he was guiding them.

From this happy delirium he was roused by a note from his late friend and companion, Mr. Jeremy Blink, dated Fellborough, and informing him of the presence of Mr. Thomas Racquet within the bounds of Welderton, and advising him to have the warrant for his apprehension put in force at once. The letter concluded with a little condolence upon the death of Mr. Whittlebury, and a little advice upon the law of copartnery, and a promise of seeing his dear friend Chuck again before the week was out.

Many of the thoughts expressed in the latter part of the epistle agreed so completely with those which had been rushing for the last hour or two through the mind of Horace Chuck, that he could not help feeling, that if Mr. Blink were not exactly the gentleman who could personify his better angel, he was at any rate one who would pass muster very well for one of an opposite character.

"He's an uncommon good man of business," concluded Chuck, as he finished the letter. "Uncommon—never misses a chance—it's odd that he don't get on in the world—I wonder whether he ever cheats anybody now—he used to do so at school—we used to say there, by-the-bye, 'cheating never thrives'—I can't make it out—Snaps and Bonnetum did me regularly years ago, and yet *they* cheat and thrive—at any rate there'll be no cheating in taking possession of the copartnership property for a while; if anybody *should* turn up to claim it, why of course I shall surrender it, after payment of the debts and liabilities, which of course must be satisfied first." Mr. Chuck would fain have thrust his hands to the bottoms of his coat pockets, but for the present was debarred that luxury, in consequence of his being a fixture upon the sofa, and there we will leave him for a while.

We must now return to Tom, whom we left keeping watch over the drunken slumbers of his ragged little guide, with his heart yearning to know the fate of Mr. Whittlebury and his Aunt Lucy. Tom dared not quit his self-imposed charge. Within the dirty ragged heap

of human flesh which lay wallowing before him lay the secret of Caroline's fate, and yet no human means could be of any avail in releasing it. The thought almost drove Tom to desperation. Time sped on; and yet the boy remained insensible. Tom tried the only remedy within his reach, drenching him with cold water, but a few guttural sounds were all that the application elicited from him.

Tom paced up and down the frozen snow in front of the engine-house, listening to the wind, and fancying that the old building rocked again, as the furious blasts came beating against its sides. Ever and anon he looked in upon the sleeping urchin, and resolved not to quit him until he had the secret from his lips. The little fellow rolled over and murmured. Tom was by his side in an instant, and flung some straw which had been scattered about in the unpacking some machinery, into a more comfortable corner for him.

The effects of the liquor at last began to disperse from the poor little fellow's drenched brain. Never did the weary traveller, benighted upon his way, see the sun rise with greater joy, than Tom perceived the first symptoms of returning animation.

"Where am I?—and where's Old Joan?" said the boy, turning uneasily over.

"You are quite safe, and out of Old Joan's way, my little fellow," said Tom, anxiously.

"She'll beat me, I know, 'cause I told of Tod's Hole," murmured the urchin.

Tom listened with greedy ear. "Tod's Hole," said he, "where's that?" but his eagerness seemed to alarm the boy. He gazed with swimming eyes into Tom's face, and putting on what in his sober moments would have been a look of deep cunning, remained silent for a minute, and then proceeded—

"Didn't I steal the grub that she used to hide for Red Bill and Scrabbes? I saw where she put it. I should like to have a touch at a little now. I know she hid some for them the night they bolted, and I don't think anybody will get it. Let's have a start after it," and again his heavy head fell upon its straw pillow.

"Does she put it in Tod's Hole, now?" said Tom.

"No, she don't,—Tod's Hole is in the old works,—but she puts other things into it though."

"I'll give you a shilling to take me to Tod's Hole," said Tom, poisoning one on the tip of his finger.

"What for?" said the boy. "Do you want to see the two ladies?"

"Yes," said Tom, "I do. How did you see them?"

"I saw them when I went down with you. Old Joan told me to bring you directly to the place; but that was when they were alive. When we got down the chain that day, I saw her hiding like, under the Gully Rock, and so I cut off to the Hole at once, in hopes to find some prog; and then I saw them laying down together, all wet."

Tom's state of impatience and anxiety could allow him to remain no longer in the engine-room, possessed now of information sufficient to guide him in his researches; he gave up the scheme of keeping the boy in his custody, and hastened round to the chasm at the back of the works. A thought instantly flashed through his mind—the chain was destroyed, and all communication with the interior cut off, at any rate for some time. The painful idea also obtruded itself, whether in his haste to secure the person of Old Joan, he had not been the means of destroying the lives of the two young ladies. Even if they had escaped from drowning, how could they, weak and exhausted as they must have been from the fright and the immersion, have sustained themselves for the three past days without sustenance of any kind. With the speed of light Tom flew back to Welderton, hoping to find, now that the first fury of the riot had passed over, willing hands enough to aid him in his attempt to reach the interior of the mine.

To his great grief, however, the tale of Tod's hole was scarcely listened to. The all-absorbing subject of the last night's outrages threw all private interests into the back ground. Every one was busy in either projecting plans for the defence of the remaining portion of the town, or of visiting the ruins of the part destroyed, and the murder of the two young ladies became, as it were, so much part and parcel of the mischief, that no one paused to give it individual attention.

Tom applied to the nearest magistrate, who promised him aid the first minute he had to spare from his duties, and then next moment forgot him. Colonel Grey was too unwell to be spoken with, and of the retreat of the willing Ewbank Tom was ignorant. Among the various reports which reached Tom's ears during his solicitations for aid, the death of Mr. Whittlebury, his Aunt Lucy, and poor Mrs. Shrinkinwood, were among the first. This seemed to place the cope-stone upon his misery, and he felt, for the first time in his life, that he really stood alone in the world. A gloomy despondency seemed winding

its chilly influence round his heart; its springs of energy became exhausted, and he turned from the sights of ruin which surrounded him, sickened by the heartless conduct of his fellow-creatures.

To leave the town, except in the direction of the works, was an impossibility. The snow, which had fallen in large quantities all the night, had completely choked up all the roads. Tom directed his steps to the 'George,' which fortunately had escaped the general pillage, in hopes of still finding some one who would for an hour or two withdraw his attention from the public misfortunes, and aid him in his endeavours to penetrate the mine.

Tom mentioned to the landlord his wish for help, either to get the shaft-rope ready for use, or the chain replaced.

"Lor, sir," said the landlord, "Mister Chuck, as the place belongs to, is upstairs—only he's rather bruised.—He's the man—he'll help, I dare say."

Tom was surprised for a moment, and then eagerly asked permission to visit him in his chamber.

The landlord's announcement at the room-door, of "Mr. Thomas Racquet," had scarcely escaped his lips, before Tom was in the room.

Mr. Chuck sat stiffly upright upon the sofa, and begged to know what circumstances had procured him the pleasure of a visit from Mr. Thomas Racquet.

Tom scarcely noticed the altered manner of his *quondam* rival: but ran rapidly through the news he had gleaned from the boy; and implored Horace, for Heaven's sake, to endeavour to find some one who would help him in his emergency.

"To-morrow it shall be looked to," said Horace.

"I want to visit the mine at once," said Tom, almost misdoubting his ears; "an hour's delay may be fatal—I will go down with any party I can get together."

"You will not do any such thing, Mr. Racquet," said Horace.

"Not search the mine!" said Tom.

"The mine has already been searched from end to end, sir, by the young lady's father and a party of her friends; any interference upon your part is totally uncalled for and unnecessary."

"But I have a clue since their attempt," began Tom, "and surely you will not omit an opportunity of testing the truth of the statement."

"I will take upon myself, sir, to do as I please. I am quite satisfied that the remains of the two ladies are not in the works; and shall certainly forbid your rambling all through them merely for ~~the~~ sake

of gratifying your idle curiosity," said Mr. Chuck, with an immense assumption of dignity.

"I will examine them from end to end," said Tom, with great violence, "in defiance of you or any other man; a foul murder has been committed within those dark recesses, and nothing shall prevent my using every means in my power to trace the murderer. I *had* hoped to have received willing and efficient help from you, Horace Chuck, instead of cold unfeeling obstruction."

"The works are *now* my whole and sole property, Mr. Thomas Racquet. The death of my lamented partner and his daughter leave them so, and I will have no midnight robber prowling over my premises."

Tom stared at the stiff figure of Horace Chuck, who had at last contrived to struggle on to his legs, and thrust his hands into their usual receptacles.

"You need not stare so, Mr. Racquet. You doubtless remember Beech End, and a robbery of a certain Mr. Chuck one fine moonlight night. You will excuse me, if after the experience I then received of your prowess in adopting other people's property as your own, I doubt your honesty—I say your *honesty*, on the present occasion."

Tom looked as if he were calculating the consequences of knocking Horace through the window.

"All I have to say is, Mr. Racquet, that I shall not trust you in the Wren's Nest; and that a warrant, which has been sometime issued, but which, with the usual cunning of thieves and vagabonds you have hitherto eluded, will be immediately enforced."

"Do you mean to say that I have stolen your pocket-book?" said Tom, gasping for breath.

"You commit yourself in your haste, Sir; I never mentioned a pocket-book," said Horace, grimly.

"I will confess," said Tom, "to having played upon your courage a little, Horace Chuck, on the night you speak of, in company with others."

"The Rattletons," said Horace, ringing the bell.

"Well, the Rattletons; the things taken from you were all returned the next morning," said Tom, "and you know that your paltry lie of the loss of your book is but a cowardly excuse for converting an innocent trick into a highway robbery."

The landlord opened the door, and stared at the two gentlemen.

"Tell Mr. Grab to step this way," said Horace.

"Grab is an officer—is he not?" said Tom.

Horace did not deign any answer; but limped across the room, and looked out of the window, with a very red face.

"Grab is an officer—is he not?" said Tom, repeating his question sternly.

"Yes, he is, sir; and holds the warrant for your apprehension," replied Chuck.

"I'll knock him, or any other man, down, as surely as he attempts to interfere with me before I have searched that mine," said Tom.

Mr. Chuck evinced his usual sign of agitation. He thrust his hands to the bottoms of his coat-tail pockets, and jingled the contents. In this respect, he might perhaps have reminded his acquaintance strongly (friends he had none—he could not afford them) of a well-known reptile, which never intends mischief without first of all warning the traveller of its intentions by shaking the rattles in its tail. Horace not only rattled his tail, but whistled also—not liking his visiter's warlike tone.

Just as Tom was leaving the room Mr. Grab made his appearance.

"This is Mr. Thomas Racquet," said Horace, pointing him out to the officer.

"I know it is," said Mr. Grab; "I've seen him before."

"Why didn't you take him, then?" said Horace.

"'Cos the warrant was only put into my hands this morning," said Mr. Grab.

"Take him now, then, can't you?" said Horace.

Tom immediately repeated his threat of resistance, until he had either made the search himself, or had seen another party undertake the task.

"Resistance will do no good, Mister," said the officer, who was a civil fellow enough, and as strong as a lion; "resistance will lead to nothing but broken heads and imprisonment; you'd better come quietly at once. It will be but a ride over to Fellborough and back; for they've done for the old gaol here; and I dare say you can soon find bail; and then you can get about this job directly, and I'll be the first to help you."

"You are a good fellow, Mr. Grab," said Tom; "and I thank you for your offer; nevertheless, I will not be caged up in stone walls until I am satisfied. As to bail, I do not know a soul in the place; therefore, stand out of my way; I am going to the works."

Mr. Grab, however, who never travelled without his shadow, opened the door and discovered to Tom the individual performing that

racter—a long, bony, dirty-looking fellow. “Two to one,” said Mr. Grab, in a jocular way.

“Three to one,” said Horace, with a sneer, and hobbling forward.

Mr. Grab suddenly found himself in the fender, battling with the fire-irons; Horace Chuck, with equal celerity, found himself under the table; and the long bony fellow outside saw so many different ways at once, and beheld so many dancing lights everywhere, that he had the greatest difficulty in finding himself at all.

So unexpected and vigorous was Tom’s onslaught, that his two first victims were disposed of almost simultaneously; with the individual at the door, however, who was awake to most moves, he had a severe although a short tussle, and he was gone.

Horace Chuck got up with two more bruises to brown-paper and vinegar, and vented the first of his temper upon Mr. Grab, to whom he applied all the hard words which came handiest and quickest.

Mr. Grab and his man stared at each other, rubbed the damaged parts of their persons, and then departed after their captive, promising that if they did get hold of him again, that they would take care he did not repeat his trick.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE RESCUE.

TOM, in his rage and hurry, found himself in the lower town, and close to Joan Illfettle’s hovel, before he distinctly remembered where he was. He was suddenly hailed by young Ewbank, and he crossed over instantly

“If you have the feelings of a man, Ewbank, help me in getting to Tod’s Hole,” said Tom, his blood boiling with the speed at which he had been running. “I am almost certain the ladies are there, starving for want of food. That rascal Chuck refuses me permission to visit the works; so quick, quick, there will be an officer after me in a minute to prevent me.”

“How—what—who told you?” said Ewbank.

Tom described the boy, and mentioned the spot where he had left him.

“Come along,” said Ewbank. “I never owed the poor old gentleman any malice, and I’m sorry for the lengths things went to last night; but there was no stopping them when the drink once got the

upper hand. Here, Jim Burn! Davy! Bob! the ladies are found! Let's get the rope up, and go to the old place. Bully Chuck says none of us shall ever touch his ground again—'tant the first lie he's told."

The shouts of Ewbank soon brought a host of his fellow-miners about him. Tom, breathless with anxiety, explained to them; but they shook their heads when they found that Ewbank's shouts of triumph were based upon such uncertain foundation. However, they agreed to get the rope up, if it were only to annoy their old master, and if they unshipped it again the instant after it had served their purpose.

The shouting crowd soon reached the engine-house: Ewbank entered it; the boy had fled. "Who the devil has been at the boiler?" said he; "the man-hole is open, and the cover gone?"

It may be necessary here to explain, that in large steam-engine boilers, a hole of sufficient size to admit a man is left at the top, for the convenience of cleansing the interior, which is termed the man-hole. This, of course, is securely covered and bolted down when the engine is ready for work.

"Never mind, lads, there is enough of us to stand by the windlass!"

All hands were now as eager for a good work as they had been the night before ready for an evil one. The windlass was cleared, the pit uncovered, and another basket brought forward, in an incredibly short space of time.

Tom, eager for the conclusion of the preparations, ran hither and thither, helping and directing.

"Run round one of you to the Maw. I left a rope there the other night; it will just do to seize ~~this~~ old piece of timber up," cried Ewbank.

Two young fellows immediately scampered off, as if their very lives depended upon their expedition, so completely had Tom's enthusiasm taken possession of the party.

"Halloo!" said Ewbank, in surprise, when the rope was handed to him, "who tied these knots? I didn't; I left the rope coiled up."

There was a silence.

"Where did you find it?" continued Ewbank.

"Tied to the chain pin, and hanging down the Maw," said the fellows.

"Lads," said Ewbank, softly, and all of a sudden, "I take it somebody must have tied these knots, and have used this rope to get into the mine. There's none of *us* would want to be there, except *one* whose head is now worth fifty guineas."

"Bill! Bill! Red Bill," said the voices, in the same under-tone.

"You are right. I'll bet any man a quart he got back to his old haunt last night, during the row. If we catch him we'll hang him at once."

Shouts of acquiescence shook the old engine-house at this proposal, and the work of preparing for the descent went on more briskly than ever.

"I'll go down first," said Tom, springing into the basket long before it was ready.

"You had better not go down alone, then," said Ewbank; "if that rascal is down there you'll have warm work of it before you can help yourself; all this row at the pit's mouth must have roused him, if he had slept like a stone."

Half-a-dozen eager volunteers immediately stepped forward to accompany Tom.

"No, no, I shall go myself," said Ewbank; "only you fellows have a care that the rope don't cut upon the pulley, and mind to have your line steady on the windlass."

"Now then," said Ewbank.

The basket, with Tom standing in it, swung over the pit, and Ewbank, after waiting for a moment to steady it, stepped lightly in as it descended.

The two travellers remained silent for above a minute, when Ewbank remarked to Tom, that they had no arms of any kind, and that a crowbar would be worth its weight in gold just then, especially if Red Bill was waiting their arrival—for you may depend upon it he'll die game," concluded the young miner.

"We shall have enough to do by ourselves," said Tom.

Their arrival at the bottom, however, was not interrupted, and Tom found himself again standing among the tangled mass of cordage, the remains of the former shaft-rope.

"This must be the way," said Tom, pointing to the dark cutting in which he had picked up the handkerchief.

"All right," said Ewbank; "look out for an iron of some sort; it won't do to go empty handed."

Tom picked up a crowbar. "How about a light?"

"No light, if you please," said Ewbank; "I know every inch of the ground; you keep hold of my jacket behind. *They'll* have a light wherever they are, and if Master Bill catches sight of a light coming his way, I'm thinking he will not hesitate long in spoiling the candlestick, with that precious old pistol of his."

As Tom and Ewbank departed down the dark cutting, the basket

was drawn to the surface again, preparatory to the descent of another pair of adventurers.

"Hush," said Ewbank, after they had proceeded some distance, "voices."

"Where are we?" said Tom.

"Near Bill's parlour! there's a light."

Tom, after a little time, distinguished a faint glimmer in a forward direction.

"Gently; now come on, and listen," said Ewbank; "its Old Joan's voice sure enough, and she's at high words with Bill."

Tom and his companion crept warily forward, and at last gained a position which enabled them to see into the part occupied by the murderer and the old fortune-teller. Red Bill was standing with a pistol in his hand opposite the old woman, who was evidently much excited, but evinced no signs of fear.

"I tell you I saw that fellow in the town twice during the riots," said Red Bill. "Spectre indeed! I could tear myself for being such a blear-eyed fool as not to have seen through the trick at once."

"Bill, it will reach you yet," said the old woman.

"Will it?" said he, sneeringly; "about as much as I shall die by my own hand to-day, I suppose."

"The day is not over," said Joan, quietly.

"No more of your fortune-telling humbug, you old hag. I've been fooled once, but am not to be done twice. Where's the grub you hid the day before yesterday? I can't find it; I am hungry."

"Gone," said old Joan.

"Gone! what do you mean? You can't have swallowed a week's grub in an hour?" said the ruffian fiercely.

"It's gone, I tell you," said Old Joan, "no matter how. I have been imprisoned in these cursed dungeons for these three days through the chain breaking at the Maw."

"It's a lie," said Bill, seizing the old woman fiercely by the throat, and shaking her violently. "I know that you're not alone down here. Some more ghosts, perhaps: precious hungry ones they'll be too, if I'd anything to do with 'em. Hark, you lie-telling old limb of Satan! I fell in with young Scrabbes just now in the engine-house, and he told me of *Tod's Hole*, and to *Tod's Hole* I mean to go. I may find something there, perhaps, which may interest me a little."

The old woman stood resolutely in the gap of the wall which served for a doorway; but Bill easily flung her shrivelled and light form on one side, and passed out.

"Now, then," said Ewbank to Tom, in a whisper, "follow hard, and we'll have him in the very place."

Tom kept close upon the young miner's heels, trembling with rage, and savage as a tiger withheld from his prey. He saw before him the assassin of Caroline, and his blood boiled through his veins.

The ruffian paced the narrow cuttings which led to the Wash with rapid and resolute steps, holding the light far above his head, followed closely by Joan, who in her turn was followed by Ewbank and Tom.

As soon as they arrived within a few paces of the dark stream, Tom nudged Ewbank, and called his attention to the plank, which was again in its place. Ewbank said nothing, but crossed after Red Bill in an instant.

Tom had scarcely reached the middle of the plank, before a sudden turning in the works hid the light, and he very nearly suffered the fate of the two poor girls. The plank shook beneath him. One vigorous spring, however, cleared the stream, and he stood upon terra firma, close beside Ewbank.

The noise Tom made by his leap evidently alarmed Red Bill, for the threats and imprecations with which he had been addressing Old Joan suddenly ceased. Old Joan, also, whose tones of remonstrance had been the whole time loud and earnest, held her peace.

Both parties paused—listening. Red Bill turned the corner back again, elevated his light, and looked down the cutting, and then went growling forwards.

"Ho, ho! old woman! here we are, are we?" said Bill, as he came opposite a hole in the rock, about a man's height from the ground, and from which was gleaming a faint ray of light. Old Joan did not answer, but by the aid of a stone about the height of a horse-block, placed for the purpose, leaped lightly into the opening, and stood in an attitude of defiance.

She had scarcely taken up this position a minute, before Red Bill made a rush upon her, and she fell shrieking upon the ground.

The cries of the old woman were answered by others from the interior; and the next instant Tom saw Caroline come forward with a light, but so pale and thin, that he scarcely knew her again.

Tom waited for nothing more, but, with a loud hurrah, leaped with one bound, bar in hand, on to the rock. Red Bill turned instantly, glared for a moment upon him as if thunderstruck, and then aimed a blow, which, if it had taken effect where it was intended, would have ended Tom's mortal career for ever; as it was, the bar with which

Tom parried the blow was sent flying from his grasp, and fell jarring against the rock.

Tom instantly closed with his savage and brutal antagonist, seconded by Ewbank ; and a tremendous wrestle ensued. The wretch kicked, bit, cursed, and blasphemed, until the rocks rung again.

By one fortunate blow, however, he rid himself of Tom, who fell staggering backwards. Caroline, who had stood as it were stupefied during the minute of the struggle, now for the first time perceived who was before her, uttered a scream of joy, and threw herself upon Tom's neck.

Tom soon recovered himself, and endeavoured to shake her off. Ewbank was evidently being overpowered in the struggle. His efforts to unclasp Caroline's hands were, however, in vain ; and he had the mortification of seeing Ewbank at last hurled head foremost out of the cave. -

Just at that moment, shout upon shout came ringing through the works. Red Bill looked back for an instant, and then sprang out and was gone.

Ewbank got upon his legs again, and shouted in return to the advancing party.

They soon made their appearance, headed, to Tom's infinite surprise and delight, by old Mr. Whittlebury himself and a young gentleman. There was a silence of a minute as father and daughter ran into each others' arms ; but Tom, who now saw all that he loved best and dearest upon earth safe, well, and out of danger, after swallowing something very like a whole flood of tears, tried to catch hold of his hat ; but having lost that in the scuffle, he seized upon a bonnet, and giving it a mad sweep round in the air, by way of invitation to the assembled miners, raised such a deafening cheer, in concert with the whole party, that the rocks almost jumped from their foundations.

The shouts, and tears, and smiles, and questions, and embracings, and shakings by the hand, made such confusion in that magnificent old cave, and bothered the poor echos so completely, choking them with new words before they had half repeated the old, that Mr. Whittlebury proposed an instant adjournment to the daylight. More torches were lighted, and everything combustible that could be got hold of, fired, to herald the triumphal procession back to the shaft. The basket was, however, in the act of ascending, and they had to wait. No matter, they were all too happy to care much about a little longer confinement. Tom had actually kissed Caroline twice, Mary Grey once—at which the

young gentleman stared very much; and had all but wrung every knuckle belonging to old Mr. Whittlebury out of its socket before any signs of the returning basket were perceived. Presently, however, it came rattling down—and the party were all drawn to the surface: there were, comparatively speaking, but few people at the head of the shaft.

“Why, where are all the fellows gone?” said Mr. Whittlebury, addressing one of the miners.

“Cut away after Red Bill, sir. He came up just before you. We heard a signal—thought it was yours—and drew him up, d——n him! he had rolled himself up in a cloak, so that we did not know who it was till he dashed out among us like a fire-flash.”

“I hope the lads will catch him,” said Mr. Whittlebury; “he richly deserves a halter.”

Tom was upon the point of expressing a like opinion, when he found himself nearly smothered in the embraces of his Aunt Lucy, who had, by Mrs. Shrinkinwood’s assistance, been driven to the spot in a borrowed vehicle, drawn by the imperturbable Gustavus, and had at that moment but just arrived.

More congratulations, more shakings and questionings, were gone through; when Tom suddenly thought of Old Joan. She was nowhere to be found; she had been left behind in the mine. She was, however, soon recovered by young Ewbank. Upon her arrival among the party, it was discovered that she was badly wounded by a stab in the side: she desired to be conveyed before Colonel Grey.

“I feel that I have got my death-wound,” said the old woman; “and I have that to tell him which no one else will, or perhaps can.”

“Come, come, old lady,” said Mr. Whittlebury, kindly; “no more fortune-telling.”

“Fortune-telling! I have done with fortune-telling; perhaps if I had never attempted it, it would have been better for all of us. But let that pass; what is done cannot be undone, but what is to come may be prevented. Take me to the Colonel’s, and all of you go with me.”

At this moment Tom’s voice was again heard in high and excited tones. Upon the party turning to inquire the cause, they perceived that young gentleman in custody of Mr. Grab and his lengthy assistant, who were forcing him in no very gentle manner off the field.

Mr. Whittlebury and the young gentleman (who had been standing very close to Mary Grey) immediately ran to see what was the matter, followed by Caroline and her friend.

"Charged by Mister Horatio Chuck with highway robbery, upon the—night of September last, at or near a place called Beech End, Bedfordshire," said Mr. Grab.

"Just stop one moment, sir," said Mr. Whittlebury. "Do, pray, Tom, explain."

Caroline's eyes asked him tearfully the same question.

Tom, between anger, surprise, and anxiety, stuttered out something which, from the confusion he was in, was anything but a satisfactory exculpation of his wild freak.

"That'll do," said Mr. Grab; "and after you have done that, you'll have to answer for an assault upon the officers of justice."

Aunt Lucy opened her eyes, and compressed her lips in silent surprise.

Mr. Whittlebury shrugged his shoulders, looked kindly but reproachfully upon Tom, and turned away also without speaking. Poor Caroline, whose heart had been glowing with delight at again finding her dear Tom reconciled with her father, suddenly spoke with an energy which startled the whole circle.

"Who believes Mr. Racquet guilty of such a vile crime?" said Caroline.

"Come away, my dear," said her father coolly; "nobody, of course; only, unfortunately for us, the young gentleman confesses the act, and this is no time or place for inquiry."

"Caroline," said Tom, "I thank you from my very heart's core for those few words. Your confidence never has been nor ever shall be misplaced. I may have been giddy, but I have never been criminal, or morally bad; I may have been idle, but"—

"You *have* been *idle*, Tom; and idleness is the root of all evil. Your life and your time were both given to you for other uses than to be squandered in mere amusement, or more vicious pursuits," said Mr. Whittlebury; "however, I hope this matter will turn out better than at first sight it threatens to do. Where do you take him, Mr. Grab?"

"Over to Fellborough, sir. The gaol is burnt down here, and their honours have so much to do with the examination of the rioters already in custody, that he will most likely have to lie there for a day or two, unless he can find bail." So saying, Mr. Grab and his satellite, thrust their knuckles into Tom's neckcloth, and bore him away.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE COLONEL LOSES A DAUGHTER AND GAINS A NIECE.

THE whole of the party then returned to Old Joan, and having placed her in a cart, at her own most urgent request, hurried over to the Colonel's residence.

Mrs. Shrinkinwood insisted upon having the honour of driving Mr. Whittlebury and his daughter in her chaise. Mary Grey and the young gentleman, whose name Mrs. Shrinkinwood proclaimed to be Stephen Ward, and who had been making Mary's eyes sparkle, and her cheeks flush with excitement with some most extraordinary news, were soon accommodated with a vehicle, and the whole party went forward. During the ride, which was of some duration, both on account of the gravity of Gustavus, and the slow pace of the cart, Caroline recounted her miraculous escape from drowning.

Old Joan Illfettle, she said, had been the means of saving her and Mary from a watery grave. As she fell, clinging to her friend, into the rushing stream, she distinctly saw the lights of the miners put purposely out; the next instant, and while they were struggling and battling with the dark and heavy water, the plank from which they had been precipitated, fell plashing by their side. To grasp it was but the work of an instant; terror had, however, deprived both of utterance, and they floated, or rather were forced down by the rush of the water.

They clung to each other, and gave themselves up for lost. Caroline remembered nothing further until she found herself in company with her friend, lying upon the straw, in the cavern called Tod's Hole, and which, she was informed by Old Joan, who attended her, was the safest refuge, under the circumstances, that they could have. Their escape from the mine was rendered impossible in consequence of the chain having broken at the Maw; and they had been sustained during their imprisonment by the coarse victuals which had been hidden for the use of Red Bill and his friend Scrabbes.

The shouts of her father and his party had not reached them after they had recovered from their swoon; whether the old fortune-teller had heard them previously she knew not.

This tale, which took some little time in relating, brought them to the Colonel's house. He was not long in receiving the party: the

hurts, from the effects of which he had been suffering, had so far improved as to allow him to be moved to the sofa in his study;—there were some papers and open letters lying upon the table before him. Long before the party had reached the room door, Mary had broken from them—had rushed in and vented her full and gentle heart upon the Colonel's bosom.

"Here's a foolish girl," said the Colonel, patting her cheek affectionately, as Mr. Whittlebury, Aunt Lucy, young Ward, and Caroline entered. "She has found a brother and a lover, and Heaven knows how many aunts besides, all in one day, and yet she is afraid of losing her father!"

Mary removed her arms from around the Colonel's neck, and sat down close beside him upon the sofa.

"What! you are not afraid of my running away?" continued the Colonel, gaily. "There, go and talk to Miss Whittlebury; I see Stephen has told you all about it. We have some business to transact; if we want you we will send for you. Miss Racquet will oblige us by remaining."

The two young ladies joined hands and retired.

"My dear sir," began the Colonel, addressing Mr. Whittlebury, "we have made a strange discovery; or rather my nephew Stephen, who has just arrived from Bombay, has been the means of laying bare one of the most villanous plots that ever disgraced humanity. It seems that a large property has been left to my poor Mary; and failing her, to go to a rascally lawyer, by name Silverwing, who was also left residuary legatee under the same will: but that is not the most surprising part of it. Where is Mr. Thomas Racquet? I do not see him."

"I am sorry to say," said Mr. Whittlebury, "that he is in custody for some wild freak, committed against the person of my fool of a partner, Horace Chuck."

"Heaven pardon me! but if he had beaten that fellow to a mummy I could have forgiven him," said the Colonel. "We must do without him, then, for a little while. Well, gentlemen, my dear girl Mary turns out to be Miss Mary Racquet, and a sister of Tom's." A sudden silence succeeded this unlooked announcement; Aunt Lucy started from her chair; seemed about to speak, and then sat down again very pale.

"Yes, Miss Racquet, the child of your poor brother's wife, who was basely stabbed upon the field of battle when searching for her husband's body. I little thought when I dragged that poor babe from

the ditch into which it had been thrown by its inhuman butcher, that I was saving the child of my oldest, best, and dearest friend, Thomas Racquet. Look, here are letters from a fellow calling himself Blink, and one from that old fortune-telling hag, Joan Illfettle, whom, I wish to Heaven, we could catch—”

“We have found her, sir,” said Stephen, triumphantly; “and have her down stairs, and what is more, she desires to see you.”

“Does she? Bravo! my boy,” said the Colonel; “hand the old lady up. We must have a little talk with her.”

Old Joan was, however, unfit to be moved from the bed upon which she had just been placed. The party, therefore, at the Colonel’s request, and also at the old woman’s invitation, adjourned to her chamber.

“You are not all here,” said Joan, looking round the bed. “Where’s Master Thomas—Mister Racquet, I mean.”

Aunt Lucy, struck with the tone of voice, leaned over the bed.

“Why surely,”—she began.

“Yes, Miss Lucy,” said Joan, “you are right: I am your old servant, Joan Middleton; and, as sure as you stand there, that young lady is your niece,” and she pointed at Mary, who had at that moment entered, accompanied by Caroline. Aunt Lucy, who had, at their meeting in Hill Street, felt a then inexplicable yearning towards Mary, folded her newly-found niece in her arms.

“But where are the proofs?” said the Colonel.

“Here!” said old Joan. “I left for India as servant to Mrs. Captain Racquet, as Miss Lucy very well remembers. Shortly after our arrival, Mary was born. At the battle of ———, the Captain was slain. Mrs. Racquet went in search of his body, and took the child with her. She was stabbed by—”

“By whom?” said the Colonel, finding she hesitated.

“It must out,” said Old Joan, struggling with her breath. “She was stabbed by my husband, William Illfettle,—him that you called Red Bill,—and the same blow which killed the mother wounded the child, from its mouth to its ear. I married that man shortly after my arrival in India, and sorrow and woe have been my portion ever since. He was much younger than myself; and years afterwards, when he,—still a robust and hardy man,—found a wrinkled old woman as his wife, Heaven forgive him!—he was a fiend to me and my child. I begged for him,—stole for him,—lied for him,—shielded him and fed him when all else had deserted him!—and yet—he—but I loved him!

—he forgot that—I loved him still—and would have saved him—if I could.”

“Did you know any one of the name of Hargrave in India?” said the Colonel, referring to a paper and addressing the weeping old woman.

“Yes, I did. He stood godfather to Mrs. Racquet’s babe, and left it all his property,” said Old Joan, “and with that came all our misery. Silverwing, the man who drew the will, was to have the money if the child died; and he proposed to my husband to take the child off. Some suspicion somehow got root in Mrs. Racquet’s mind, which was her principal reason for taking the child with her; and she discharged me, although I *then* knew nothing of the wicked treachery. After the battle, my husband, whom I had not seen for many months, but during which time he had been leading a most dissipated life, returned to me, rich, and with his discharge purchased, accompanied by two meek-faced, sneaking scoundrels, of the name of Scrabbes, and who had been the confidential clerks to Silverwing. From one of their drunken brawls I discovered their secret,—that they had murdered, and had received their reward. I held my peace. Both child and mother were reported as having died upon the field.”

“How do you know that the young lady who has passed for my daughter is the same?” said the Colonel.

“By the scar upon her cheek,—by her great family likeness,—and also that I have never totally lost sight of her since she was born. It so happened that the woman you employed after you discovered the babe, was an old acquaintance of mine. She showed the child to me. I immediately knew it again, disfigured as it was by the gash, and vowed that whenever I could, without danger to my husband, replace it with its family, I would. At the time you brought the child home, it had on the same little dress which had been worn by its brother Thomas when an infant, and which was presented to him by his aunt, Miss Lucy.”

“I remember the dress very well,” said the Colonel; “Mary has it among her valuables.”

Aunt Lucy, Caroline, and Mary, immediately departed in search of the article, and soon returned, Aunt Lucy having, in an instant, identified the work of her own hands upon the birth of her brother’s first-born.

“What brought you to this part of the country?” said the Colonel, again addressing Old Joan.

“I heard that my husband had returned to his old haunts—the

Wren's Nest works," said she, "and I determined to follow him ; the more so, because I knew that Colonel Grey lived in the vicinity. My child died upon the road, just after I had been relieved and protected by one who, if he had known who had been sitting by his side on the roof of that coach, would, instead of covering me with his cloak, have hurled me under its wheels. I went on to Welderton—saw Mary—found my husband, and during one of his fits of brutal treatment, threatened him with coming events. He was ignorant and superstitious. I soon got a name among the savages of the district for fortune-telling. I foretold to Scrabbes that *his* day was approaching, and to convince him, contrived to show him Mary, during one of her visits to the mine. The sight so struck the sneaking scoundrel, that he has never been himself since. It was his pen which dropped the hint to his rascally master, Silverwing, of how to dispose of the child, and who would be the most likely person to undertake the task. After he had seen Mary, he told my husband of his having seen the ghost, and was disbelieved and laughed at for his pains. Bill, however, made inquiries, and found out the real state of the case,—that the child of his old benefactor was alive, and in the neighbourhood. Instead of feeling thankful that his soul had been spared the guilt of murder, the foul thought of turning the knowledge to advantage crept into his heart. He made Scrabbes write to Silverwing, demanding money to keep the secret. No answer was received for some time, when his brother Michael suddenly made his appearance,—he who generally goes by the name of Blink. This Blink made inquiries of the Racquet family to find out whether they had any knowledge of the existence of a daughter ; and finding they had not, came down here, and paid his addresses to her under the name of Smythe, and upon being repulsed with indignation, resolved that the original doom of the poor girl should be carried into effect. Silverwing, who had sent him over, promised him a thousand pounds upon his making all secure."

"The villain !" said the Colonel. "But he is dead !"

"Who is dead ?" said Joan.

"Silverwing," said the Colonel ; "and his scoundrel clerk, Michael Scrabbes, *alias* Blink, *alias* Smythe, is dead too. The old man, it seems, died from fright, in consequence of having his papers seized by the officers of Government for some forging transaction—and his unworthy associate was found, yesterday morning, dead in the snow, upon Hawksfell Pikes ; his body was at first taken for that of our friend

Whittlebury, in consequence of some papers which were found in his possession, belonging to the firm."

"I have little more to add," said Joan : "If you have possession of Silverwing's papers, you have abundant proof of the truth of all I have told you. When I met Mr. Thomas Racquet at the Maw, the idea seized me of making his presence subservient to my fortune-telling schemes, and I intended to have brought the brother and sister together in the mine. Your anticipating your descent spoiled my plan; I was down there ready to receive them—and then, and not till then, did I discover the fearful plot for killing the poor girl by the fall down the shaft. I watched my husband, when he thought no one was near, and followed him with a concealed light as he led his unsuspecting victims, after their escape, to the lower level. I was still unaware of his intention until I saw him heave the plank on one side: the moment the ladies fell, he and his fellow extinguished their lights and fled, brushing so closely past me as almost to touch me. I immediately flung the plank into the stream; the two young things clung to it; I showed my little light, and after much trouble drew them out, and carried them through the old works to the cavern in which they were found."

"You must have heard our shouts," said the Colonel, "when we were searching for them."

"You did not visit the old works," said Joan, "or we should. As soon as the young ladies had in some measure recovered, I left them while I went in search of help. I met Mr. Racquet at the foot of the shaft—here again my fortune-telling mania seized me; he threatened to imprison me. I was angry and threw off his arm; he left the mine, and destroyed our only chance of escape by throwing down the chain. Oh! never shall I forget the knell it rang upon my heart as its iron links came clanking upon the rocks. Luckily I bethought me of the provisions I had hid for my husband's consumption—upon these we have subsisted."

"What brought your husband back again to the mine?" said the Colonel.

"Hunger," said Old Joan; "hunger brought him back, and fear of being taken; escape from the town was impossible, in consequence of the snow—and he thought that his old place was the best hiding hole."

But little else of consequence was elicited from Old Joan Illfettle; her tale, however, coupled with the proofs which had fallen into the hands of Stephen Ward, completely established the right of Mary both to the possession of a large property and to the name of Racquet.

The Colonel's tale was soon told. He had never mentioned the circumstance of her infancy to Mary, wishing her to look up to him alone as her father; fearing that the uncertainty of her parentage might unsettle and distress a mind, naturally of a sensitive turn, without being of any essential benefit. She had, therefore, been brought up and educated as his daughter; "and a very excellent, dutiful, and affectionate daughter she has been too," said the Colonel, in conclusion, "and although I must lose her as a child, at any rate, if I am not very much mistaken, I shall soon have her for a niece."

Every body immediately began wishing poor Mary joy of her new name and her fortune, and, in spite of her tears and her blushes, soon contrived to win a smile or two from her. Aunt Lucy immediately hoped she had not caught cold, and gave her invaluable advice upon cork soles and sable boas, and half a dozen affectionate kisses into the bargain. We do not know what Stephen said—he was a sly fellow that Stephen—he got Mary up in a corner all by himself, and said so much that it is a question whether he would ever have finished, but for an interruption of the servant.

"Mr. Chuck," said the servant, opening the door, and in marched that well bruised individual, with his head looking like a brown paper parcel.

"Mr. Whittlebury, my dear sir," said Horace, advancing and extending both his hands, "I am delighted to see you again alive and well; they told me you were dead."

"So I find, Horace Chuck, and you gladly believed it," replied the old gentleman sternly.

"No, my dear sir, no, I was grieved beyond measure."

"So much grieved, Horace, that you had prepared to seize upon the whole of my property. Look you! you cold-blooded, calculating viper! you, whom I have warmed in my bosom until you have stung me—this letter was found upon the dead body of your fine friend Blink, suffocated in a snow-drift in trying to get over from Fellborough to meet you; it contains enough, and more than enough to transport you: but in respect for the memory of your father, I spare you. Begone, sir, begone from my sight for ever. Your affairs shall be settled by our solicitors."

Horace Chuck hesitated for a moment, curled up his lip, put his hat upon his pickled and brown papered head, thrust his hands to the bottoms of his coat tail pockets, and departed.

He was met upon the stairs by a lady and gentleman and a little

pug dog, the gentleman passed him without speaking ; the lady bowed, and the little pug dog snarled and made his teeth meet in the calf of his leg. Upon his emerging into the street, he perceived 'Gustavus' at the door, and judged therefrom that the lady was Mrs. Shrinkinwood, the gentleman he knew to be Mr. Tom Racquet, and the little pug dog he *felt* was 'Bobby.' Mrs. Shrinkinwood had tendered her chaise, and it had been accepted ; the principal witness against Tom, a long-legged drunken dragoon, by name Richard Gardner, having pre-*re*aricated so much in his evidence that the magistrate had dismissed the case.

Tom immediately explained the cause of his arrest at greater length, and certainly with better grace, than he had done in the morning. Colonel Grey, however, shook his head ; Mr. Whittlebury looked grave, Aunt Lucy looked as if she could have said that his imprisonment would have served him right ; Caroline looked vexed, and Mary looked puzzled.

It was not, however, a time for much scolding ; and so Tom got off with some frowns, and a stinging word or two from the Colonel, who reminded him that his father, at his age, had carried the standard of his country in two pitched battles, had mixed in the serious business of life with great credit, and had thus left other mementos behind him, besides his having been born on one day, perhaps married upon another, and having died upon a third.

Tom felt a little abashed at the Colonel's strictures ; but the exuberance of his spirits could not be bottled down for long. Mrs. Shrinkinwood had informed him of the discovery of his sister ; he, therefore, waited with great decorum until the Colonel had finished, and then ran to Mary, shook her heartily by the hand, and wished her joy, kissed his Aunt Lucy, who boxed his ears ; tried the same manœuvre with Caroline, who boxed his ears without letting him do it—(but it was not a very hard box, though, and that is a fact)—wrung young Stephen's hand until the tears came into his eyes, and did such odd things, and played such odd pranks, that every body began to suspect he had taken leave of his senses.

Tom's exhilaration of spirits, however, soon became contagious ; and in five minutes there was not one of the party but was quite as bad as himself, and played quite as many odd tricks, and said quite as many unaccountable things.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE LAST.

THE reward which had been offered for the capture of William Illfettle, commonly called Red Bill, and his mate Scrabbes, still remained unclaimed: the lower town had been searched through, and scouts sent out upon the road, to endeavour, if possible, to trace any footsteps corresponding with his well-known broad and heavy tread. It was impossible for him to have wandered far; the snow still lay in heavy drifts in the mountain-passes, rendering escape from the vicinity impossible: at last the dusk of evening again fell upon the whitened ground, and the search was relinquished for the day.

Craftily, with wary tread, and eyes staring into the darkness, crept a thick-set burly man from under a large stone, where he had been hidden from the day-light, like some huge toad; the stone lay among thousands of its fellows, in a hollow formed by two abrupt hills. Onward he crept, his teeth set hard against each other, taking the direction of the Wren's Nest mine, and crouching and listening with intense anxiety for the least indication of footsteps.

He reached the engine-house in safety, and entered it softly, as if he were afraid of disturbing the slumber of some dear old friend.

"Now then, you slinking, white-livered cur, I have you—I'll teach you to write letters—king's evidence, eh? Thanks to the drunken fit of your brat of a boy, I know where to find you," said the fellow, throwing off a hat which brought an old black wig along off with it.

By means of a lucifer match, he procured a light; and then, with stealthy step, placed a short ladder against the side of the engine-boiler, ascended it, and peeped in at the opening on the top, called the man hole.

At the furthest extremity of his iron hiding-place lay Scrabbes, fast asleep, and more than half drunk.

"All right," said Red Bill, with the grin of a demon. He then descended, and hunted about the machinery for some minutes, cursing the whole time; suddenly, with a savage oath, he pounced upon a piece of iron about two feet square, and again ascended his ladder; the piece of iron exactly fitted the aperture through which he had peeped at his doomed and sleeping partner. With the speed of a well-

practised hand, the lid was screwed and bolted to its place on the roof of the boiler; but still the sleeper slept; the noise of the well-greased screw had not been sufficient to awaken him.

The bald ruffian prowled about with his light among the dark forms around him, intent upon his heart-sickening revenge. Suddenly a low rush of water was heard; the noise, although he expected it, startled even him; it was the boiler filling, and he went to the door and watched; not a thing was to be seen but the white snow spreading far away into the distance.

He then returned, and busied himself with preparing the furnace fire; the wood was damp, and refused for some time to light. He went upon his knees to blow it with his mouth, when suddenly a terrific thumping from within the boiler started him to his feet.

His wretched victim had been awakened from his sleep, by finding himself up to the middle in water, and in all the agony of terror was giving a signal of his presence within, little thinking to what useless purpose.

Red Bill again rushed to the door, for the noise seemed, to his scared conscience, enough to rouse the distant town; but still all was quiet.

He hastened back, and with frantic gestures of delight, piled the fire, stirred it, and tended it with jealous care, totally unheeding the stifled shouts and loud knocking from the interior of the boiler.

Scrabbes soon began to feel the effects of the fire; the water lost that intense coldness which had originally roused him from his drunken slumber: the moment this circumstance struck him, he desisted from hammering against the side of the boiler, and listened. The sharp crackling and bursting of wood was plainly audible beneath his feet; the cold perspiration of intense fear burst from his forehead and face, and he stood paralyzed, with the steam gently curling from the surface of the water whirling and eddying round him. Again did he betake himself to beating the sides of his horrid prison-house, and shouting with all his might: the air became hot and insufficient to sustain life; he felt an oppression in breathing which almost caused him to drop. In one of his wadings to and fro, his foot struck against something upon the bottom: he stooped his face into the now perfectly warm water, and picked it up; it was a screw-wrench, or tool used in the fixing the nuts upon the bolts which bound the boiler together. With almost a scream of delight, he im-

mediately felt round the side until he found one of the iron fastenings, and applied with frenzied haste his newly found means of escape. In a few minutes the nut gave way, and fell into the water; one vigorous blow upon the end of the screw and it flew out into the engine-house, and Scrabbes paused and wiped his steaming forehead with his hand. The bolt having been a few inches beneath the level of the water, its release allowed a stream to escape; but still to his horror no one answered his signal. He thrust his finger out of the screw hole, hoping by that means to draw attention; and he succeeded.

A heavy blow with a ponderous hammer mashed it to atoms against the side, and the next instant a wooden peg was driven firmly into the hole—and the fainting wretch fell backwards into the scalding water.

The ringing echos of that blow were the last noises heard in the dark old engine house: the shouting and knocking from the inside of the boiler had ceased, and nothing but the low roar of the furnace, and the sharp crackling of the new wood, as it was flung, heap after heap upon the fire, disturbed the stillness of that dark night. The ruffian, to convince himself that his fiendish act was complete, knocked in his turn against the boiler, and called in jeering tones to his old mate to come out: but no answer was returned to his brutal voice—his victim was dead.

There was something in the roar of the great fire, and the hissing of the fast-rising steam, which troubled the murderer. He felt that he could not remain, and yet lacked nerve enough to depart, and every moment expected to see the huge boiler burst, and deliver to the world the pale and soddened corpse which lay trembling in the heaving water.

He was suddenly startled by lights and many voices not far from the engine-house. A party were holding torches close to the ground, as if seeking for something; they came onward, still holding their torches down. Young Ewbank was at the head of them: they were evidently tracing footsteps in the snow. Taking advantage of a temporary pause, Red Bill jumped out of a small window, which looked in a contrary direction, on to some straw, which had been placed there for some temporary purpose, and heaped it over himself.

The party soon entered the engine-house, and he heard their exclamation of surprise at the fire; one of them finding the steam up, with the force of habit, went to see that the valve was free, and called out that a bolt had started, and that the hole had been pegged. Blood

was plainly discernible, and the nail and a portion of a human finger hung by a piece of skin just under the peg.

"Why, the finger seems to come from the inside," said Ewbank, with a shudder; "what can it mean?"

"Open the man-hole! let go the steam!" shouted the party. The steam soon rushed freely into the air, and the boiler was soon emptied. Everybody expected that Red Bill, the man whose footsteps they had been tracing, had there met his fate.

Long before the boiler was sufficiently cool to admit of the secret being discovered, a party outside, wishing to look in at the window, had ascended the heap of straw, and trod upon the hiding murderer.

A loud shout soon brought the remainder of the party to the spot, when Red Bill was immediately uncovered. He made a vigorous and determined resistance, but was overpowered, and again thrown upon the straw heap. It was soon found impossible to hold him without binding; one of the party ran into the engine-house, and flung some heavy chains from the window. These, amid a torrent of oaths and execrations, were at last bound round his body, and he was fixed upon his back.

"Look here, you bloodhounds," exclaimed the ruffian, as soon as he discovered that his escape was hopeless; "send me that young fool, Ewbank, round, will you?"

Ewbank, who had been investigating the boiler, soon made his appearance.

"You dogged my footsteps, did you?" said Red Bill, trying to raise himself upon his elbow. "You expected to get something by me, did you? and you shall have it. Don't sneak off, you fool. Come closer, can't you? you surely aint afraid of a bound man!"

Ewbank had scarcely time to frame an answer, before the sharp report of a pistol burst from among the straw; the ball cut Ewbank's cheek, but otherwise did him no injury. The rage of the miners knew no bounds at this barefaced attempt upon their young favourite, and preparations were immediately made for putting into execution their threat of hanging the miscreant half way down the shaft. The straw, however, upon which he was lying, was discovered to have taken fire from the discharge of the pistol, and one or two of the party attempted to smother the flames.

A sudden idea, however, all at once seized upon them, and they desisted, shouting, "Let him burn! let him burn!"

The dreadful secret of the boiler was now discovered, and added fury to the already maddened crowd.

Heaps of lighted straw were thrown upon the wretch in an instant—lights glanced in all directions, and shouts and jeers answered his screams of agony as he rolled about in the dense and hot smoke.

Madly his savage companions danced round him as the flames at length burst forth from the mouldering heap, licking his form until limb after limb was lost in one shrivelled and unctuous cinder.

The glare of light which the fire had occasioned brought the police from Welderton down upon the party before they were aware. The body of Scrabbes was removed carefully, to await a Coroner's inquest, and young Ewbank and his party were imprisoned for the murder of William Illfettle. All the judge could say could not convince the young miner and his companions that they had acted wrongfully: they were condemned to death, but, from extenuating circumstances, the sentence was commuted to transportation for life.

Of Old Joan Illfettle, who, against everybody's expectation, recovered from her hurt, nothing further was seen. As soon as she was able, she left the Colonel's residence stealthily, and in the dead of the night, carrying nothing with her but the clothes which she had upon her back.

Horace Chuck emigrated to New York, and was in due time enrolled among her free and enlightened citizens, and is now in high feather, and as ac-tive, cute, and spry, as any gentleman in the States.

Who amongst our readers cannot picture to himself or herself the strewing of flowers, the waving of hats, the shaking of white aprons and handkerchiefs, and the ringing of bells (albeit there were but two in the steeple), which welcomed Aunt Lucy and her Nephew Tom back to Coddlethorpe? And also the grins of Old Bob the gardener, the screams of the peacock, and the thorough-paced horse-welcome from Stately, which awaited the arrival of Old Mr. Whittlebury and his pretty daughter at Stamford Hill? Not one, certainly! They have all, at some time or other of their lives, experienced the gladdening sensations attendant upon a hearty cheering welcome home,—if not from the far Indies, at any rate from the perils of Hammersmith and Turnham Green,—not to mention the more distant Margate, and the cliff-bound Isle of Wight!

But who is to imagine the rampant joy of the two little bells in Coddlethorpe Church tower, when Tom and his bride made their appearance after their matrimonial tour in the Highlands? One of them actually cracked his little sides with joy upon the happy occasion, and never got over it afterwards, but remains to this day a melancholy instance of over-excitement acting upon an impaired constitution.

Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Ward, too, made their appearance shortly afterwards from Florence, and almost cracked the other bell. And then there was the arrival of the Colonel, and also of Mr. Whittlebury, who was very sly and full of his fun, making the two young matrons laugh till they cried again; so taking it altogether there never had been such a commotion in Coddlethorpe before. The very dust kicked up by the Regulator, and the crack of Mr. Barnes's whip, seemed to partake of the general excitement. Even Mr. Mincingham, the draper, was thrown into a fever, and gave Susan, who had run across to him with the news, a pair of black eyes (to fasten her dress with) in return for her information.

But the excitement died away at last, and the pretty little village regained its usual placid beauty; but alas! for human quietude, the treacherous calm remained but for one brief twelvemonth.

Something or other happened at the Hall which set the two little bells off again as madly as ever. Doctor Gallot was sent for. Tom had not been at the counting-house for two whole days,—(he had cut the Rattletons, by the bye, and Bob Phillpots—and had taken Horace Chuck's place, as partner with Mr. Whittlebury,) and there was a pretty to do! and altogether it seemed a very desperate business.

We do not know what it was all about; but in about a month after that, the great punch-bowl, which had not been filled for ages, was filled to the brim; and Colonel Grey, Mr. Whittlebury, Tom's three aunts, Mary and Stephen, with a host of friends and relations, set to work to empty it with right hearty good will; and the first toast which was given, was given by the Colonel,—“Long life to little Tom Racquet!” Who little Tom Racquet was, was a mystery, no other individual of that name being present besides *our* Tom, unless a little roundabout parcel of lace and swansdown, which was lying tumbling about in a basket and crowing away in fine style all by itself in a snug little corner of the room, and about which Tom and Caroline were most desperately solicitous, was referred to under that title.

Colonel Grey was a sly wag, too, in his way, and began to banter

Mr. Dalton, the curate, desperately about Aunt Emily : and we rather suspect that he had some foundation for his jokes, but that is nothing to any body. As to Mr. Whittlebury and Aunt Lucy — when the Colonel began his jokes upon them, they electrified the whole company at once, by frankly confessing that they had been married only the day before, and meant to take up their residence at Stamford Hill forthwith. At this, there was another shout, and another glass of punch, and another toast ; and the fun at last got so fast and furious, that the little bundle of swansdown and lace set up a most astonishing roar, and was carried out with great bustle and solicitude by all three of Tom's most affectionate aunts, jostling each other famously, and who, between them, very nearly dropped it, in their extreme anxiety each to have hold of an

END.



